SAVAGES VERSUS SETTLERS, WILDNESS VERSUS WHEATFIELDS: AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO THE (EUROPEAN) SETTLEMENT STORY IN EARLY CANADIAN PRAIRIE FICTION

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Abstract

The experience of wilderness and of homesteading on the prairies provided the primary subject matter for Canadian prairie fiction in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. My thesis uses ecocriticism to make a connection between the cultural values embedded in this literature and the ecological consequences of European settlement. It uses the philosophical concepts of bioregionalism, deep ecology and ecofeminism as the ideological framework for a study of novels and short stories published prior to 1930. It uses the theoretical concepts of cultural materialism to analyze, from a socio-ecological perspective, the power relationships within this body of literature. More specifically, it looks at the way in which English-speaking writers privileged the values of civilization above wildness and the values of western European culture above the cultures of Métis and indigenous peoples. My thesis divides early prairie fiction into the categories of wilderness romance and homesteading romance. It looks at representative samples of these genres, and concludes by discussing two examples of early prairie realism. Throughout the entire thesis I view the fictional treatment of European settlement from the perspective of current ecological thinking and, in doing so, provide a critique of both past and present attitudes to the prairie environment.

The introduction provides a philosophical and critical approach to my study of literature and of its historical context. It traces the anthropocentric values of "old world" immigrants to the dominant ideology that developed in post-Medieval Europe: the Western Judaeo-Christian worldview of dominion over Nature, the faith in science and technology, and the materialist ideals of capitalism and economic progress. It considers the role that

prairie fiction played in creating the cultural values that led to the modification of the natural prairie landscape, and explores the potential of critical theory to provide oppositional interpretations of the European settlement story. It then discusses the philosophical and theoretical framework of the ecocriticism that I use in my study of the interface between immigrant settlers, aboriginal people and the land.

Chapter One introduces the wilderness romance. It defines the terms which I use to describe immigrant, aboriginal and mixed-blood peoples. It points out that the transcendent nature of the romance makes it an ideal form for a body of literature that privileges civilization above wildness and culture above Nature. It shows how the quest structure of the wilderness romance endorses the values of Western civilization, and uses a legend from one of these romances in order to illustrate the way in which they empower the dominant culture. Chapter One concludes by showing how the English-language definitions of "wild" and "civilized" work to elevate the culture of "old world" immigrants above the traditions of a semi-nomadic wilderness people.

Chapter Two looks at the ambivalence to wildness apparent in two examples of the wilderness romance: R. M. Ballantyne's The Young Fur Traders, or Snowflakes and Sunbeams: A Tale of the Far North (1856) and William F. Butler's Red Cloud: A Tale of the Great Prairie (1882). It discusses both authors' use of Edenic imagery in their descriptions of the great Northwest, their differing views of aboriginal people and their pragmatic conclusions to the heroes' wilderness quest. It examines the implications of the protagonists' return to a prosperous, mercantile civilization, and points out that Ballantyne and Butler failed to recognize the incompatibility of their simultaneous images of the West as pristine wilderness and future home of a flourishing industrial economy.

Chapter Three looks at the civilizing impact of Victorian Christianity in two examples of missionary fiction: R. M. Ballantyne's The Prairie Chief: A Tale (1886) and Egerton Ryerson Young's Oowikapun or How the Gospel Reached the Nelson River Indians (1896). It suggests that both novels privilege civilization above wildness by equating Christianity with the order and domestic virtue of Victorian culture and by equating native spirituality with untamed Nature. Since Christianity was an unquestioned good in the Victorian hegemony, and native spirituality a threat to Christian dominance, the values of civilization basked in the reflected virtue of Anglo-Protestant ideology while wilderness and Nature were tarnished by their association with pagan superstition and evil. Chapter Three shows how the successful achievement of the heroes' wilderness quests involves bringing the light of Christian civilization to the darkness of the heathen wilderness.

Chapter Four examines the process of cultural genocide in two fur trade novels. It looks at the way in which Agnes Laut uses the captivity narrative in Lords of the North (1900) to illustrate the savage behavior of the uncivilized Indian, and the way in which Hulbert Footner uses the adventure story in The Fur Bringers: A Story of the Canadian Northwest (1920) to portray native and mixed-blood people as either wicked and cunning or naive, childlike and dependent. It shows how the authors attempt to invalidate the traditional culture of a wilderness people by comparing its apparent weaknesses with the stronger, morally superior culture of their white protagonists. Both novels thus validate the obliteration of aboriginal traditions and their replacement by the values and institutions of Western civilization.

Chapter Five uses three novels to explore the way in which romance writers used stories of native "rebellion" to justify the suppression of political resistance. Joseph Collins,

an ardent Canadian nationalist, wrote Louis Riel The Rebel Chief (1885) to inflame Eastern opinion against the Métis "rebels" who threatened to destroy his vision of a strong and united nation; this chapter looks at his use of historical misrepresentation, inflammatory language and tragic melodrama to discredit the "barbarian" forces that threatened imperial law and order. Ralph Connor's later account of an abortive 1885 Indian uprising, in Corporal Cameron (1912) and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail (1914), is more sympathetic towards native people but it, too, privileges white civilization by equating the interests of immigrant settlers with the public good. By further associating the Indian and Métis "rebels" with the disorder and chaos of wild Nature, Collins and Connor helped to invalidate native resistance and to ensure Anglo-Canadian victory over the degraded "savages."

Chapter Six looks at the connection between patriarchal power and the "old world" social order in Harwood Steele's Mounted Police romance, Spirit-of-Iron (1923). It shows how Steele privileges civilization above wildness by glorifying a para-military hierarchy based upon "masculine" strength and adherence to the values of Empire. Power accrues in Steele's novel to men whose fists and nerve and endurance enable them to enforce their will on women and Nature and weaker men. Chapter Six looks at the way in which this power hierarchy helped to convert an unproductive wilderness into a prosperous British colony, and reveals the enormous costs that women unwittingly pay for the privilege of supporting key (masculine) players in the drive towards "progress."

Chapter Seven explores the connection between patriarchal man's dominance of woman and Nature in Douglas Durkin's The Heart of Cherry McBain (1919) and The Lobstick Trail (1921). It illustrates the symbiotic relationship between male dominance and economic progress in the building of two important patriarchal institutions--the railway and

the mining industry. Durkin's novels cast a romantic glow over the men who risked life and capital to build roadbeds and to develop the mineral resources of the Northwest; Chapter Seven, however, shows how the rules which govern this development empower men at the expense of women and Nature, and reveals the high human and ecological costs of denying integrity to both the feminine and the natural world.

Chapter Eight introduces the homesteading romance. It notes the conflicting impulses behind popular images of the West as pastoral utopia: the settler wants to create both an arcadian garden in the wilderness and a prosperous outpost of a mercantile civilization. It discusses the philosophical origins of the industrial market economy, and looks at the social, economic and ecological costs of commercial, export-oriented agriculture on the Canadian prairies. Chapter Eight notes the absence of indigenous and mixed-blood people in the homesteading romance, and discusses the unrealized potential of traditional Métis culture to provide immigrants with an ecologically appropriate response to the "new world". It discusses one French-Canadian novel, Georges Bugnet's Nipsya (1924; trans. 1929), which provides the only significant study of Métis culture in early prairie fiction.

Chapter Nine looks at two novels which served as homesteading manuals for would-be immigrants. Both Alexander Begg's "Dot It Down;" A Story of Life in the North-West (1871) and W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother (1908) provide advice on farming for profit. Chapter Nine looks at the development of export agriculture on the prairies, and considers the role that Begg's and Jarvis's novels played in promoting high production and prosperity as the goals of farming. It points out that neither novel considers the economic climate created by a national policy which privileged business interests above the interests of farming, and concludes that they are therefore not only flawed guides to the

development of sustainable agriculture but also unrealistic proponents of a materialist utopia.

Chapter Ten looks at the contribution of two English novelists to the anthropocentric ideal of mastering wild Nature. Harold Bindloss's and Mrs. Humphrey Ward's prairie fiction portray strong, virile man who carve farms from the wilderness and transform "wasteland" into wheatfields. Guided by a dream of dominion over the natural world, they are rewarded both by wealth and by marriage to well-born English maidens. Bindloss and Ward celebrate the heroism of the stalwart men whose agricultural victories provide prosperity for the Canadian North West and bread for the people of England; Chapter Ten, however, traces the cultural roots of current environmental problems to anthropocentric values such as those embedded in their novels.

Chapter Eleven examines the part that literature played in integrating "foreign" immigrants into an essentially British society. It looks at the process of assimilation in four prairie novels: Ralph Connor's The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan (1909), Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows: A Story of the Alberta Foothills (1926), Eric Gill's Love in Manitoba (1911) and Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart (1923). These novels equate becoming a good Canadian with adoption of the mercantile ideals of economic progress and with rejection of the peasant ideals of self-sufficiency. As Chapter Eleven points out, they helped to obliterate the values of an "old world" peasantry which viewed land as sacred and simultaneously strengthened the Western imperative of human dominion over Nature.

Chapter Twelve discusses the industrialization of agriculture in Robert Stead's Grain (1926). It points out that although Stead was critical of the greed and materialism that accompanied Western settlement, his novels reflect the anthropocentrism endemic to early

prairie fiction. It looks at Stead's treatment of the homesteader's "sacred" mission to subdue the earth. It examines the historical context in which Grain is situated, and it discusses Stead's ambivalent--although ultimately favourable--response to the phenomenon of farm mechanization.

Chapter Thirteen contrasts Western man's quest for wealth and power with woman's oppositional quest for healing community. Using Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925), Arthur Stringer's Prairie trilogy (1915-22) and representative fiction of Nellie McClung (1908-25) as texts, it explores the way in which these writers privilege nurturing relationships above the exploitative relationships that characterize prairie agriculture. Stringer's heroine condemns her husband's obsession with money and power, and proposes an alternative ideology based upon love of family and home. Ostenso's Judith Gare rebels against patriarchal tyranny. McClung's protagonists serve as compassionate caregivers who view the land as a resource that provides sustenance--not wealth--for its human inhabitants. In their common opposition to an androcentric culture based on power over women and the land, these novels portray the feminine quest for healing community and for harmony between humans and their prairie home.

Chapter Fourteen looks at two examples of early prairie realism--Frederick Philip Grove's Settlers of the Marsh (1925) and Our Daily Bread (1928). It discusses Grove's love for the prairie landscape, his admiration for the self-sufficient man of the soil, his distaste for economic ambition and his tragic view of life. It contrasts the tragic realism of Our Daily Bread with the comic spirit of reconciliation in Settlers of the Marsh, and suggests that the latter proves better adapted than tragedy as a form in which to cast the heroes' quest for nurturing community.

The Conclusion examines the role of the critic as social prophet and revisionary historian. It discusses the role of myth in influencing the course of history, summarizes the cultural impact of the myth of progress created by the wilderness and homesteading romance, notes the existence--and importance--of an oppositional quest for a harmonious relationship with the land, and reviews the role of bioregionalism, deep ecology and ecofeminism in providing the philosophical basis for a sustainable culture appropriate to the prairie bioregion. It considers the responsibility of both homesteaders and turn-of-the-century business entrepreneurs for current environmental degradation, and concludes that the dominant interests of urban politicians, consumers and business people have always been the impetus to agricultural expansion and the continuing depletion of prairie soils.

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To all of these people, I am grateful.

I dedicate this study to the farmers, ranchers and researchers who are striving to develop a sustainable form of prairie agriculture.

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Introduction: An Ecological Approach to Literature and History

> The contemporary historian has to establish the value of the study of the past, not as an end in itself, but as a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our own time.
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> - Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism, 1978[1]

The prairie landscape is one of the most changed landscapes in the world. During the century and a quarter since its settlement by European immigrants, large areas of natural parkland and prairie have been transformed from biologically diverse, stable ecosystems to unsustainable monocultures of forage crops and grain. This transition from a wilderness populated by aboriginal people to an agricultural region inhabited by European farmers is meticulously documented in the pages of early prairie fiction. Implicit in most of these novels is an uncritical endorsement of the "progress and development" ideology that contributed to the rapid exploitation of the natural environment. Writers from R. M. Ballantyne in 1856 to Robert Stead in the 1920s enthusiastically recorded the pioneering work of the missionaries, fur-traders, railroad builders, mounted policemen, miners and homesteaders who brought Western civilization to the prairie wilderness. My work as a literary critic is to explore the ideological implications of their worldview in order to understand the cultural roots of current environmental problems. In doing so I will develop a form of ecocriticism that integrates the ecological insights of bioregionalism, deep ecology

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[1]p. 41.

and ecofeminism with the "political" insights of cultural materialism and new historicism. I will use this ecocriticism as the theoretical basis for a study, in early prairie fiction, of the relationships that empowered European immigrants at the expense of aboriginal people and the non-human inhabitants of the wild, unbroken prairie.

The motivating force behind this study of the interface between prairie fiction, prairie agriculture and the degradation of the prairie environment has a lot to do with my personal need to answer some questions about the ideological implications of my sometimes conflicting roles of academic, farm homemaker and environmental activist. When, at the age of 21, I returned with my husband to the farm which has been in my family since the 1930s, I saw myself as one of the "back-to-the-landers" who was pioneering a move toward regional self-sufficiency. During the next ten years I helped raise two children, grew most of our fruit and vegetables, preserved food for the winter, baked bread, made yoghurt and did all the other things that a farm homemaker was supposed to do. I saw these activities, along with my more "political" activities of public speaking and organizing for social change, as part of my commitment to an ecologically appropriate way of life. Later, when I returned to university to complete an undergraduate degree and to start graduate studies, I saw my study of literature as preparation for an academic career that would enable me to teach the values of ecological sustainability.

Something, however, went wrong. Our farm grew bigger and the size of the farm machinery increased. The tractor and combine spew carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the fertilizer and herbicides contaminate the groundwater and the export of our grain crops contributes to the loss of soil fertility. Although I continue to bake and garden and preserve, we purchase coffee from food-hungry Third World nations, buy plastic-wrapped cheese in

the local supermarket and light our house with coal-generated electricity. On top of all that, most of my academic work has had nothing to do with the cultural implications of English literature. These discrepancies between my conscious ideology and the implications of my domestic and academic activities have led me to question the role of both literature and agriculture in determining the fate of the prairie ecosystem.

Cultural historians have always looked to the past to provide answers to questions that plague us in the present. The ecologist of today, confronted by vast wheatfields and an agricultural industry intimately connected to multinational petro-chemical corporations, shakes her head in bewilderment and asks how the simple act of raising food has strayed so far from its pre-industrial origins. The answer lies somewhere in an exploration of the cultural roots of the ecological crisis.

The historical development of prairie agriculture owes much to the anthropocentric values that "old world" immigrants brought with them to the West. By the middle of the nineteenth century, European farmers, labourers, tradespeople and merchants had long ago replaced the pre-Renaissance perception of an organic world with a modern, mechanistic worldview that exalted science, technology and the market economy. Western Christianity had taught them to exercise human dominion over Nature, and capitalism had taught them to view the natural world primarily as a source of raw materials. These anthropocentric beliefs had been strengthened by a patriarchal value-system which deemed women and Nature inferior to civilization and men. The pioneer who set out to conquer a wilderness thus did so secure in the faith that God and society would bless his "noble" quest. This culturally-induced arrogance did nothing to encourage settlers to adapt their lives and expectations to the physical realities of a new land, and contributed instead to the imposition of Western

civilization on the prairie wilderness.

The spiritual worldview which allowed humans to dominate Nature emerged from an occidental, Judaeo-Christian belief in the divine right of humankind to control the earth for its own benefit (White, Jr., "Roots" and "Conversation"). Historian Lynn White, Jr. traces the roots of this anthropocentrism to the technological and scientific discoveries of the Middle Ages, whereas Carolyn Merchant (in The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution) attributes its origin to the post-Medieval spirit of scientific rationalism. Both agree, however, that the desire to master Nature stems from cultural traditions rooted in the history of Western Christiandom. Prior to 1500 the dominant concept of the cosmos was of a living organism made up of interrelated, interdependent life forms (Merchant 103-105). Its replacement by the mechanistic worldview of the seventeenth century allowed people to view themselves as both detached from and superior to the natural world. With the acceptance of a historical God "whose transcendent character . . . detached Him from Nature" and of a mechanical universe composed of isolated and lifeless parts, the way was clear for the development of a "powerful people-serving science" characterized, as Stan Rowe notes, by the basic assumption "that people have the God-given right of dominion over all creation" (Home Place 75). The ensuing sense of separation from Nature has allowed humans to create and use technology designed to make life easier for people without considering its destructive impact on other species (Rowe, Home Place 23). Although ecologically conscious Christians are starting to adopt the worldview of creation spirituality, which responds with awe to **all** of creation, Western cultural development over the past 500 years has left us with an attitude of superiority to Nature and with the technological capacity to impose our will upon the natural world.

Capitalism, like post-Medieval Christianity, espoused the anthropocentric doctrine of human dominion over Nature. Based upon the premise of the inalienable right of the individual to develop the resources of the world for his or her own benefit, it shares the Judaeo-Christian view of Nature as God's gift to humankind. Although the devout Christian uses natural resources in order to glorify a benevolent God, whereas the capitalist uses them to increase personal wealth and power, the end-use of Nature is the same. For both Puritan and capitalist, H. Paul Santmire notes, ". . . the chief criterion for man's dealing with nature was **utility**" (71). This mercantile view of Nature as an economic resource had important implications for the development of the "new world". It meant, as William Cronon notes in his study of the ecological changes that resulted from the European settlement of New England, that the settlers viewed the landscape in terms of commodities, "treating members of an ecosystem as isolated and extractable units" (21) rather than as intrinsic parts of an interconnected whole. A description of a forest thus became a list of economically valuable trees rather than an account of a complex ecosystem. Cronon attributes the degradation of the New England environment to this utilitarian attitude to Nature and to the replacement of an aboriginal village economy based on shifting agriculture and hunter-gatherer activities with household production units engaged in the sale of agricultural products from privately-owned land. The desire for wealth encouraged landowners to increase their production of goods for the commercial marketplace and, therefore, to increase their land holdings. This view of the land and its resources as capital led to the exploitation of the "new world" environment:

> The dynamics which led colonists to accumulate wealth and capital were the most dramatic point of contrast between the New England economy of 1600

> and that of 1800. The economic transformation paralleled the ecological one, and so it is easy to assert that the one caused the other: New England ecology was transformed as the region became integrated into the emerging capitalist economy of the North Atlantic. Capitalism and environmental degradation went hand in hand. (161)

Christianity provided the moral justification for human dominion over Nature. Post-Medieval science supplied the technological capacity for its efficient exploitation. It remained for capitalism to furnish the political ideology and the economic infrastructure which made technical capability and the spiritual endorsement of "progress" a powerful force in the modern world.

The view of Nature as a commodity which influenced the relationship of European settlers to New England had an equally strong impact on their counterparts in the Canadian West. The early explorers, disappointed in the lack of wood and water on the prairies, described the land as desolate and barren because it was deficient in natural resources that would serve their need. The settlers who followed them, however, perceived the treeless prairies as enormous, untilled wheatfields and wrote in glowing terms of the riches that they offered to the ambitious immigrant. Although their descriptions are superficially very different, they are similar in that they both perceive the landscape in terms of its ability to provide raw materials which would bestow wealth upon its human inhabitants. The direction in which farming has developed reflects this view of prairie agriculture as an economic activity. Rather than provide food for domestic consumption, Canadian farmers continued the exploitative pattern established earlier by the fur traders and raised wheat as a cash crop to be sold on the European export market. "From such beginnings," Rowe (rightly) asks,

"what hope for stewardship of the land?" (Home Place 167).

The Judaeo-Christian worldview of dominion over Nature, the faith in science and technology and the ideal of capitalist economic development created the ideological blueprint which European immigrants brought with them to the prairies. Although its directions were not conducive to the creation of an ecologically sustainable culture in the lands of their origin, they proved even more inappropriate in the undeveloped land of the West because they prevented the settlers from adopting elements of the indigenous culture. As Dick Harrison notes, Anglophone immigrants rejected the Métis way of life because it did not promise the affluence that European industrial capitalism had led them to expect. Their own culture, however, proved particularly ill-adapted to life on the prairies. "In particular," Harrison says, "the kind of individualism which pervaded this culture was better adapted to a market economy than to a subsistence economy, and to a settled land than to one where the natural environment still poses a considerable threat to the individual" (Unnamed Country 18). The adoption of such Métis (and Mennonite) practices as community settlement and economic cooperation could have reduced the sense of isolation and the element of risk inherent in an agricultural economy and thus could have "drawn the people into an earlier reconciliation with the strange land" (18). Instead, European immigrants attempted to reinstate in the "new world" the economic and cultural conditions of their homelands.

The impact of this Eurocentrism was the creation of what Alfred Crosby calls "Neo-Europes." In his study Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900, Crosby notes that Europeans have not only politically, economically and culturally conquered lands in virtually every area of the globe but that, by spreading their plants, animals and microscopic life forms to these countries, they also have altered "new world"

ecosystems. This Europeanization of the landscape, Crosby says, resulted in a condition of continual disruption--"of plowed fields, razed forests, overgrazed pastures, and burned prairies, of deserted villages and expanding cities, of humans animals, plants, and microlife that have evolved separately suddenly coming into intimate contact"--and of the domination of natural life forms by imported plant and animal "weed" species (291-92).

Cronon's Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England is one of the few studies to document the destruction of ecological stability that occurred in one North American ecosystem as a result of European settlement. Although there are no analogous studies of the Canadian West, we can piece together from the existing literature a picture of similar changes in the ecological diversity and sustainability of both the prairies and the parkland. Stan Rowe notes that the degree of cultivation of the Canadian prairie possibly exceeds that of any comparable ecosystem in the world, and that it continues to expand incrementally. Already something over 60% of it is devoted to tilled agriculture and, normally, more than 50% of it is cultivated every year. The aspen parkland has suffered from similar development and is "reduced to a patchwork of small remnant endangered ecosystems in a matrix of tilled land" (Home Place 20). David A. Gauthier and J. David Henry call the Canadian prairies "one of the most altered environments found on the face of our planet" (189), and point out that agriculture and urbanization have "transformed more than 80 per cent of the native prairie landscape" (190). Monoculture grain and forage crops have replaced much of the tall-grass and short-grass prairie, the mixed grass prairie and the aspen parkland, and herds of beef cattle have replaced the buffalo, the antelope and the prairie dog. This loss of diversity has resulted in less stable ecosystems and in agricultural practices that have resulted in soil erosion, compaction, toxification, salinization and loss of

organic matter (Home Place 172). Soil scientists D. A. Rennie and J. G. Ellis have estimated a 40 to 50% decrease in the organic matter of Saskatchewan soils, a "serious" loss of soil nitrogen and an "alarming" (52) increase in soil salinity as a result of agricultural practices. Far from being sustainable over thousands of years, prairie agriculture after little more than one century has been forced to supplement its dwindling soil fertility with chemical fertilizers in order to continue to meet the demands of an export-oriented agricultural economy.

Prairie fiction has played an ambiguous role in the creation of the cultural values that have led to this Europianization of the prairie landscape and to the unsustainability of prairie agriculture. As one of the "signifying system[s] through which . . . a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored," which Raymond Williams defines as "culture" (Culture 13), literature reflects the way in which we relate to each other and to the natural world. No writing, however, simply reflects an objective portrait of reality. Western Canadian writers, as Robert Kroetsch observes, both "record and invent" (Treachery 5) the prairies. The ideology embedded in prairie writing influences our attitude to the mores of our society and thus helps to create new social values. Although critics such as Theodor Adorno have suggested that art "always was, and is, a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions" (qtd. and trans. in Grossman 4) even while it reflects their objective substance, a close look at the canon of prairie literature indicates that our fiction as often as not affirms the values of these institutions. Indeed, by transmitting the worldview of the dominant culture, art as often as not acts as an agent of what the Italian critic Antonio Gramsci calls "hegemony". That is, by "helping to represent and reproduce the myths and beliefs necessary to enable people to work within the existing social

formation" (Belsey, Critical Practice 58), it serves the interests of those powerful individuals and groups who determine the direction of society. The view that all art is "a practice that aims at unsettling the subject" (Roland Barthes, qt. and trans. in Grossman 5) or a critical voice out to "undermine any one rigid scheme of living" (Burke viii) fails to account for the endorsement of the status quo inherent in much popular art and serious literature.

Prairie fiction, like other bodies of writing, does not reflect a unified and consistent worldview. By itself, therefore, it can play a limited role in providing the philosphical basis for an ecologically sustainable society. Although much of our recent literature is critical of the anthropocentric values that helped to determine the exploitative pattern of prairie history, most of the fiction written during the settlement period itself validates the optimistic boosterism of that era. Since the "landscapes of our making match and reflect society's cultural inscapes" (Rowe, Home Place 15), it is not surprising that land use patterns mirror the obsession with material progress that motivated the development of prairie agriculture. The recognition of this connection between literature, cultural values and political reality helps us to understand the historical roots of current ecological concerns. Given its ideological bias, however, early prairie fiction cannot play an active role in creating ecologically appropriate new values. It remains for literary theory (along with new fiction) to provide us with the conceptual tools that will enable us to deconstruct a morally bankrupt social order and to construct a new philosophical framework upon the ruins of the old.

Recognition that literary theory legitimately can play such a political role requires an acknowledgement of the ideological nature of all criticism. Like Terry Eagleton I define ideology as those beliefs which determine our relationship to the power-structure of society. Ideology includes not only the "deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people

hold," but also "those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power" (Literary Theory 15). Literary theory, like other forms of discourse, influences the way in which we perceive these power relationships. Its political nature is obvious in those studies which examine the social hierarchy via a study of literary content, language or form. The decision to look at gender relationships, the discourse of colonialism or the ideology of Victorian melodrama has implications which clearly connect theory to social power. Equally political, however, is the decision to focus solely on structure or aesthetic qualities. By reading novels and stories and poems in isolation from their social context the critic denies political power to the literary text. This act is political because it tacitly supports the power relationships embedded in the existing social hierarchy. It is political because it accepts the ideology of the dominant culture.

The twentieth-century expansion of the role of literary criticism to include a discussion of social, political and sexual issues suggests that there is widespread critical acceptance of theory's overtly political nature. Modern criticism, as Eli Mandel notes, has become a "strikingly effective social instrument" which "serves as a vehicle of political comment and social awareness" (qtd. from preface to Another Time in Mandel, Romance 13); by making such subjects as racism, colonialism and ageism the focus of critical discourse, it enters the public arena of political debate. Post-structuralist critics like Mandel reject the notion that literature is a self-contained entity existing apart from the world of ordinary experience. They see it, instead, as influenced by "contextual forces (such as society, history, and ideology)" (Hutcheon 237) that must play an important part in any critical discussion of the text. Critical theory provides a way of "knowing" a literary text as

the product of social struggle (Lentricchia 11). It teaches readers to "establish the unspoken in the text" (Belsey, Critical Practice 136), to dig beneath the surface of obvious interpretations in order to expose unchallenged assumptions and political beliefs (Raglon 30). Working within the textual perimeters of the dominant worldview, it yet provides the basis for a critique of existing power relationships and, therefore, for a philosophy of radical social change.

Existing criticism of prairie fiction has focused not so much on power relationships as on the impact of the land on prairie society and, indirectly, on literary form. Edward McCourt's The Canadian West in Fiction, originally published in 1949 and revised in 1970, was the first of many studies to establish that prairie fiction is influenced by "the artist's involvement with a physical environment" (125). This position was reaffirmed in a variety of essays and book-length studies: Henry Kreisel's "The Prairie: A State of Mind" in 1968, Laurence Ricou's Vertical Man / Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction in 1973, Dick Harrison's Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction in 1977, Gerald Friesen's "Three Generations of Fiction: An Introduction to Prairie Cultural History" in 1981 and R. Douglas Francis's Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960 in 1989. All of these critics accept as their starting point Kreisel's now-famous statement: "All discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (6). Other critics, such as Eli Mandel in his 1973 essay "Romance and Realism in Western Canadian Fiction," make a connection between literary form and the experience of life in a new country. Western Canadian fiction, Mandel says, involves both "finding forms appropriate to new sets of experience" (61) and making connections between contemporary

writing and the older "literary" material (folklore, legend, tall tales) that constitutes the roots of the prairie literary tradition.

My study will start from the premise, established by these earlier critics, that the form and content of prairie fiction has been influenced by the relationship between European settlers and the physical landscape. It will use ecocriticism as the theoretical framework for an examination, within early prairie fiction, of the power relationships that have determined the direction of Western society. Rather than consider the power relationships between women and men, as feminist criticism does, or the power relationships between capitalists and workers, as Marxist criticism does, it will examine the interconnected relationships between European immigrants, Nature and the indigenous people who occupied the prairie prior to the agricultural settlement of the West.

Since every age faces problems unique to its own time, literary theory is of necessity a shifting body of critical practices that responds to changing social conditions. During stable times, as Eagleton notes, we take for granted theories that permit the effective functioning of society. During times of crisis, however, we seek new theories that will return the world to a state of moral equilibrium:

> For much of the time, our intellectual and other activities bowl along fairly serenely, and in this situation no great expenditure of theoretical energy is usually necessary. But there may come a point where these taken-for-granted activities begin to falter, log-jam, come unstuck, run into trouble, and it is at these points that theory proves necessary. Theory on a dramatic scale happens when . . . the traditional rationales which have silently underpinned our daily practices stand in danger of being discredited, and need either to be

revised or discarded. (Significance of Theory 26)

The "traditional rationales" of economic progress having been discredited by widespread ecological degradation, critics are developing theories that challenge the growth-oriented ideology of Western civilization. Late twentieth-century ecophilosophy seeks to transcend the anthropocentric worldview that has evolved from "the seventeenth-century Galilean-Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian science" (David Griffin, n.p.) and to replace it with an ecocentric worldview that blends modern scientific understanding with traditional ethical, aesthetic and religious beliefs. Ecocriticism provides the theoretical tools for this endeavour. It offers one way of analyzing the social values reflected in literary texts and, by making us conscious of their shortcomings, raises the possibility of social change.

Ecocriticism enables us to look at the social mores that helped to create an ecologically unsustainable society and provides us with a sense of direction regarding the development of new, more appropriate values. Ricou, in a recent editorial in Canadian Literature, notes that ecological theory is connected to the replacement of "the pastoral story or agricultural ownership" with a new myth explaining our relationship to the land: "To own the land and its creatures **absolutely** will not do, and we now look to a myth that explains a different connection, not of possession but of communication, certainly, and respect" ("Big About Green" 4). My goal as an ecocritic is to develop the language and the critical concepts required by this new myth. In doing so I will borrow from ecophilosophy ideas about new ways of relating to the natural environment. I will borrow from cultural materialism a way of reading a text that allows the reader to see the ideology hidden beneath the surface and a theory about the way in which social change takes place.

Although I take a middle ground in the debate between the adherents of thematic and

structuralist criticism, the overtly ideological nature of my study places me in the camp of those critics who turn literary commentary "into a sociopolitical act" (Cameron 113). Structuralists rightly insist that the subjective nature of language makes it impossible for literature to reflect an objective picture of social reality. They argue that thematic critics are wrong when they attempt to identify patterns of meaning that illustrate the national character or describe regional cultures that reflect geographical place: "Such criticism presumes not that knowledge is a verbal production of meaning but that meaning lies outside language, in some objective or 'prediscursive' history or geography" (Cameron 120). Instead, they insist, language itself helps to create meaning. **How** a writer says something is inextricably connected to **what** s/he says. Although I agree with structuralist critics that discursive practices are important in determining the meaning of literature I do not, however, share their enthusiasm for the study of literary works in isolation from their social context. Literary works are not "autonomous verbal structures" (Cameron and Dixon 140) that can be read without considering the political world of both author and critic. Barry Cameron is correct in saying that there is no direct correspondence between literature and an externally verifiable social "reality," but he fails to acknowledge the extent to which literature does reflect a variety of cultural values and the extent to which our reading of texts helps to create the new values that ultimately determine the structure of our society. Ecocriticism insists upon this connection between literature and the world. It sees the ecological crisis as the result of a cultural hierarchy that privileges human-centred values above earth-centred ones, and is critical of structuralist criticism which perpetuates the anthropocentric view that language can create "liberated universes" (Raglon 32) in which the human imagination can exist independent from the natural world.

Form and content cannot profitably be separated in a socio-political analysis of literature. Indeed, the structure of a work influences its content as much as the content influences form. ". . . in any field of study not yet reduced (or elevated) to the status of a genuine science," Hayden White says, "thought remains the captive of the linguistic mode in which it seeks to grasp the outline of objects inhabiting its field of perception" (Metahistory xi). What a writer has to say, in other words, is largely determined by the way in which s/he says it. Structuralist critics, W. H. Abrams notes, see the form of a work as constituting a set of conventions which set up particular expectations in the reader; such expectations "enable him to make the work intelligible--that is, to **naturalize** it, by relating it to the world which is defined and ordered by the prevailing culture" (71). By choosing to write according to the conventions of the pastoral romance, for example, the writer sets up reader expectations that any conflict between humans and Nature will be harmoniously resolved--an expectation very different from that established by the conventions of realist fiction. Novelists thus use literary form as the "essential organizing principle" (Abrams 67) which enables them to construct their own version of historical events. By using the particular conventions of romance or comedy or postmodern fiction, the writer "impose[s] meaning and formal coherence" (Hutcheon 232) on the chaos of history. The variety of literary forms that prairie novelists use to construct their accounts of Western settlement reflects their different views of the historical significance of this event. How they view the complex relationships between the settlers, the indigenous people and the land will be mirrored in the structure, as well as the content, of their stories.

My own concept of these relationships is influenced by the ideological premises of human ecology, which suggest that we need a new way of viewing the interaction between

humans and Nature. The roots of the words "ecology" and "agriculture" themselves suggest the philosophical basis for this harmonious vision:

> Ecology means house/home-study, study of organisms in relation to the larger surrounding systems (homes) of which they are parts. Human ecology has to do with the living land, the organic systems of air-water-soil organisms within which people live and to which they are related.

If humanity is to survive, Rowe notes, human ecology must include the development of "right relationships" between people and the land. Since the way in which we practice agriculture affects these relationships, our attitude to it has a major impact upon the sustainability of the environment:

> Agri/culture means the cultivation of fields to produce crops. Within the words **culture** and **cultivation** is **cultus**, to care. Behind it, in turn, is the Sanskrit word **kwei** meaning to dwell with, as well as to care for. We are led back to an idea, deep in the language, that agriculture has to do with people dwelling on the land and caring for it. (Home Place 166)

How must we care for the land? What new belief systems should govern our relationship to it? I suggest that the concepts of deep ecology, ecofeminism and bioregionalism provide appropriate ideological guidelines for a study of the interface between European settlers and the land in western Canadian fiction.

Deep ecology replaces the anthropocentrism that elevates humanity above Nature with the "biocentric egalitarianism" (Zimmerman 140) of a worldview that emphasizes the interconnection of all life. It attributes the ecological crisis to the result of viewing Nature only in terms of its extrinsic value to humans, and blames the degradation of ecosystems on

our wasteful use of what we perceive as natural "resources." Deep ecology proposes not only that we see Nature as having "intrinsic meaning and value of its own" (Yol Jung 95), but also that we recognize its importance as greater than that of humanity. It suggests that we consider "Ecosphere before community, ecosystem before organism, the whole before the part" (Rowe, Home Place 40), the planet before people.

Ecofeminism replaces patriarchal values with a non-hierarchical worldview that, like deep ecology, emphasizes the interconnection of all life. It attributes the domination of both woman and Nature to the "**power-based** morality, structures and relational processes" (Birkeland 74) of patriarchal culture, and envisions the replacement of coercive authority with personal autonomy and community-based decision-making. Ecofeminism challenges the dualistic thinking that creates a dichotomy between "what we call nature and what we believe is superior to Nature" (Griffin, Susan 8), and proposes instead an egalitarian social system in which women and men, Nature and civilization, have equal status.

Bioregionalism views all life forms as the interdependent inhabitants of a **specific** place. It sees the world as composed of "identifiable geographical areas of interacting life systems that are relatively self-sustaining in the ever-renewing processes of nature" (Berry, Thomas 86). Central to bioregional thought is the belief that every society must create and reflect values which enable it to establish an "ecologically and socially sustainable pattern of existence" (Berg 6) within its own bioregion. These values lead the human inhabitants to adapt themselves, physically, spiritually and psychologically, to their local environment rather than attempt to force the environment to meet their expectations. Humans then become **part** of the biotic community (which is composed of all the life forms of the bioregion) rather than **exploiters** of that community. Bioregionalism further recognizes that

culture is influenced by geographical place, and suggests that the human/land relationship determines the social, political and economic history of a region (Melnyk 78).

Although deep ecology, ecofeminism and bioregionalism provide the philosophical framework for this study of prairie fiction, it remains for cultural materialism to provide it with the critical tools of literary theory. Ecocriticism is, as yet, in its infancy[2]. It can provide an ecological perspective on literature, but has still to develop well-defined critical practices. Cultural materialism, a "left" poststructuralist theory, analyzes from a socio-economic standpoint the power relationships in literary texts. I will use its critical concepts to analyze from a socio-ecological perspective the power relationships in early western Canadian fiction.

Poststructuralism initially does not appear to have much in common with the politics of ecological sustainability. It provides a critical approach that emphasizes the rejection of earlier theory rather than the development of positive concepts which could help humankind adapt to changing social and ecological conditions. Raman Selden's summary of its major themes suggests that it is primarily a reaction against the moral certainty of an earlier age:

> The questioning of all 'depth models', the decentering of the world and the self, the rejection of elitist aesthetics and experimental formalisms, the

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[2]D. M. R. Bentley is one of the few critics to use what he calls "ecological poetics" in a study of Canadian literature. Bentley proposes a form of literary criticism based upon recognition of the interdependence of humans and Nature and upon the importance of both ecological and cultural diversity. His intent is to "generate a method of reading which diminishes the gaps among people, their world, and their feelings while also emphasizing the uniqueness of all things, be they people or plants or poems, in face of the forces that would grind them down into a denatured uniformity" (274). In his recent study The Gay]Grey Moose: Essays on the Ecologies and Mythologies of Canadian Poetry 1690-1990, he uses an ecological approach that "offers resistance" (275) to those social forces that would obliterate the unique characteristics of different environments, cultures and poetic styles.

> disruption of all discursive boundaries, the obliteration of the frontiers between high and low culture and between art and commodity, and the resistance to meaning and interpretation, are all themes of poststructuralism. (74)

Central to poststructuralist theories is the concept of the "absent centre." Deep ecologists, ecofeminists and bioegionalists respond to the threat of nuclear holocaust and global ecological destruction by proposing new worldviews to replace the cultural values to which they attribute social and ecological breakdown. Poststructuralist critics, however, see only the collapse of fixed values and the loss of stable points of reference in a chaotic world (Selden 72). Their sense of uncertainty manifests itself in a reluctance to assign fixed values and meanings not only to literary texts, but also to language itself. Both words and texts, according to poststructuralists, contain the inherent potential for endless deconstruction. In the absence of objective certainty, literary interpretation and evaluation become subjective processes. The critic can no longer justify positions by referring either to authorial intention or to the external evidence of the text.

In spite of their different responses to the "ontological uncertainty" (Selden 72) of the postmodern experience, ecologists and poststructuralists are both critical of the Western cultural values that have spawned our social and ecological crisis. Sue Ellen Campbell, in an essay provocatively entitled "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet," points out that ecologists and theorists share an opposition to traditional authority and a critique of the concept of objectivity (202, 204). Their most important shared premise, however, is their criticism of "the traditional sense of a separate, independent, authoritative **center** of value or meaning" (206-7). Poststructuralists, conscious

of the intertextuality of literary works, realize that every text is connected in some way to other texts. Ecologists, aware that an ecosystem is composed of interdependent life forms, realize that all parts of Nature are similarly interconnected. "Perhaps the most important idea that follows from this premise," Campbell says, "is that human beings are no longer the center of value or meaning" (208). Deep ecologists and poststructuralists both reject the assumptions underlying humanism, and agree that we need new visions of our place in the world.

Poststructuralism and ecological theory, then, provide an adequate basis for a critique of the forms and content of Western literature and society. What they fail to offer, however, is a theoretical basis for analyzing the power relationships that maintain this society and a theoretical basis for proposing radical social change. An emphasis on individual freedom "obscures the power arrangements" (Adair and Howell, "Subjective Side of Power" 221) of society and hides the fact that the economic benefits of development are often made possible at the expense of women, aboriginal people and the earth. It remains for one specific poststructuralist theory, cultural materialism, to explore the implications of this imbalance.

Cultural materialism, and its American counterpart new historicism, emerged in response to a political need for criticism that would analyze power relationships in a cultural/historical context. New historicism, a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt, appeared in the United States during the 1980s. Cultural materialism, a term borrowed from the work of Raymond Williams, grew from the broad field of cultural analysis in post-war Britain. Influenced by some of the developments in feminism, Marxism and poststructuralism, it is particularly indebted to the work of Williams, Althusser, Macherey, Gramsci and Foucault (Dollimore 2-3). Both theories reject the concepts of a "transhistorical human condition"

(Dollimore 4) and of a collective worldview held by entire societies during particular historical periods. They differ, however, in their view of the stability of power systems within dominant cultures. New historicists acknowledge that the dominant culture produces resistance to its use of power, but believe that this resistance is always "contained and thus neutralized" (Porter 262). Cultural materialists, on the other hand, believe that this resistance can result in new power relationships and, therefore, in social change.

My decision to use the critical concepts of cultural materialism rather than of new historicism is the product of an unreasoning faith that humanity has the ability to transform the power relationships of an anthropocentric, patriarchal society. I like the Marxist view that the function of literary criticism is not merely to interpret literature but to change the world (Davis and Schleifer 371). My perception of the direction in which the world should be changed, however, bears little or no relationship to Marxist thought or to the political ideology of cultural materialism.

Marxist criticism is derived from Marx's view that the "superstructure" of ideology and politics is dependent upon the "base" of socio-economic relations. According to this view, all cultural systems are the products of economic systems and all social values are reflections of the material interests of the dominant social class (Selden 24). Marxist critics attempt, by exposing the exploitation of the subordinate class by the dominant class and by using literature to trace the history of social resistance and social change, to take power away from the bosses and to give it to the oppressed. Williams takes this position in his study of the oppression of the rural working class in Britain. He sees agrarian capitalism as the major force which transformed rural England from its pre-industrial origins to its present state by "making both men and nature instrumental to a dominating purpose" (Country and City 82).

Williams's critique of capitalism, however, is based more upon its unequal distribution of the rewards of this transformation than upon its exploitation of Nature. Although he does acknowledge the environmental impact of capitalist economic development, he is primarily concerned with social oppression. His definition of the character of the capitalist mode of production as "not the use of machines or techniques of improvement, but their minority ownership" (Country and City 294) suggests that he views the British transition "from peasant control of natural resources for the purpose of subsistence to capitalist control for the purpose of profit" (Merchant 43) as unfortunate mainly because the workers failed to gain control of the means of economic production. This position assumes the superiority of humanity to the natural world that, as Rowe notes, lies at the root of our major predicament:

> Politics and economics continue to centre on the individual and the collectivity, on free enterprise and social welfare, neglecting ecological necessities of a higher order. Neither philosophical liberalism championing liberty nor philosophical socialism championing equality will save us from ourselves. (Home Place 7)

Marxism views collective humanity as of greater importance than the ecosystem which is home to all forms of life. It thus fails to provide the ideological basis for the development of an ecologically sustainable society[3].

In spite of ideological discrepancies between cultural materialism and ecological

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[3]Williams acknowledges that, historically, Marxism "includes a triumphalist version of 'man's conquest of nature'" (Materialism and Culture 109), but attributes this characteristic to its repetition of the basic concepts--"limitless and conquering expansion; reduction of the labour process to the appropriation and transformation of raw materials" (110)--of capitalism and imperialism. It remains to be seen whether or not Marxism can overcome this unfortunate legacy of nineteenth-century materialism.

thought, the critical practices of the former provide a good basis for the theoretical development of ecocriticism. I suggest that they share a number of premises: the recognition that all literature is inseparable from its cultural context and that literary criticism must therefore be interdisciplinary in nature, the recognition of the subjective nature of both language and written history, the recognition that historical periods are not unified entities but are composed of various competing interests, and the theory that the literature of opposition can help to shift the balance of power from the dominant to an emergent culture. In the discussion that follows I will modify these theories of cultural materialism in order to develop a form of ecocriticism that explains the reasons for the degradation of global ecosystems and that proposes a way in which the cultural values of society change.

Like new historicism and cultural materialism, ecocriticism recognizes that literary works are written and read within a specific cultural context. Bakhtin notes that they are a form of communication between the author and the reader, and that this communicative role demands social interaction: ". . . this unique form of communication does not exist in isolation; it participates in the unitary flow of social life, it reflects the common economic basis, and it engages in interaction and exchange with other forms of communication" (Bakhtin 395). The recognition of this interaction between literary texts and social institutions has important implications for ecocriticism. It means not only that texts are historically embedded in a particular period whose values, both dominant and oppositional, in some way influence both the content and form of the text (as Greenblatt illustrates in "Shakespeare and the Exorcists"), but also that they are read from within a system of social, political, economic, ecological and personal circumstances that direct the reader to a specific interpretation (Campbell 204). When I look at early prairie novels, therefore, I will consider

both the historical context in which they were **written** and the present historical context in which they are **read**. The recognition that literature is a social practice also suggests the interdisciplinary nature of critical theory. Lentricchia suggests that the late eighteenth-century establishment of "imaginative writing" as the only concern of literature serves the interests of "the coercive and even totalitarian tendencies of modern society" (54) by enclosing it in its own space. Literature thus isolated from other writing is denied the prestigious status of history and philosophy and becomes mere entertainment, its criticism a study of the fanciful and of the aesthetic qualities of "creative" fiction, drama and poetry. Severed from social reality and from history, it is "impervious to power" (Porter 263) and untouched by the ecological and material conditions of people's lives. It is thus rendered impotent as a form of social criticism. Ecocriticism, like cultural materialism, blurs the discursive boundaries between literature and other texts and articulates literature's connection to other disciplines. It borrows from ecology the concept of social and ecological interdependence, the belief that "no amount of knowledge of entities will produce understanding of the environment of life unless it is accompanied by an equal understanding of the processes and relationships which bind entities to their circumstances and to one another" (Meeker 10). Like Nature, literature cannot be understood in isolation from its broader context. Ecocriticism therefore recognizes that the discourse of history, philosophy and sociology is essential to our understanding of the social mythology that consitutes the cultural basis of Western society.

Although ecocritics, like cultural materialists, study literature in a historical context, they realize that we cannot fully know the past and that this historical context is therefore both subjective and incomplete. The written histories on which I depend for my "facts"

about the European settlement of the West and against which the reader measures the historical accuracy of my work are, for example, themselves interpretations of historical events. Historians interpret history by the process of selecting certain material and omitting other material, and by the way in which they fill in the gaps in their knowledge (White, Tropics 51). They use, as primary sources, early historical accounts which are themselves constructed from other written texts (such as letters, journal entries and reports). There is thus no objectively verifiable "history" against which literature "can be foregrounded" (Selden 105).

Literary critics, however, must recognize as subjective not only the historical context in which they place their study of literature but also the form and content of critical discourse itself. Eagleton's explanation of the recent distinction between "language" and "discourse" suggests that the latter word has significant political implications:

> The shift away from structuralism has been in part, to use the terms of the French linguist Emile Benveniste, a move from "language" to "discourse". "Language" is speech or writing viewed "objectively", as a chain of signs without a subject. "Discourse" means language grasped as **utterance**, as involving speaking and writing subjects and therefore also, at least potentially, readers or listeners. (Literary Theory 115)

Discourse, Eagleton suggests, is language used in its social context. It implies social relationships that are themselves "part of broader political, ideological and economic systems" (Literary Theory 117). Words therefore can have different meanings depending on the particular social or historical situation in which they are used. "Progress," "growth" and "development," for example, represented near-sacred concepts to the turn-of-the-century

prairie booster and continue to elicit the support of his contemporary Chamber of Commerce counterpart. They have negative connotations, however, for deep ecologists, who associate them with the arrogance of anthropocentrism. Words used in this manner, within the discourse of ideological positions, have more or less power depending on the dominant culture of the age (or of the dominant culture of a particular group). They fail to convince when they are outside the boundaries of what a society considers acceptable thought. As Selden notes in his commentary on the work of Foucault, "It is not enough to speak the truth; one must be 'in the truth.'" Those who violate the "rules" which determine "what is considered normal or rational" (101) at a particular time are condemned to silence. The concept of "truth," or socially sanctioned discourse, is thus a subjective construct that changes with the fortunes of competing interest groups.

Ecocriticism, like cultural materialism and new historicism, recognizes that history is an account of the struggle for power between these groups. It views historical periods as the product of competing and conflicting cultures rather than as unified entities reflecting a single worldview. It accepts from Foucault the premise that the "meaning" of history can be read only in the context of this struggle for power:

> The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail--but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. ("Truth and Power" 56)

The written history of any period is thus an interpretation of the power struggle of opposing

factions. Foucault notes that the concept of power is not always negative, that it does not always imply repression, but that it is also a "productive network" which "forms knowledge [and] produces discourse" ("Truth and Power" 61). Although this discourse may be a liberating one for previously oppressed segments of society, it usually works in the interests of the dominant culture, which maintains power by depicting its own ideologically-based worldview as the unified worldview of its entire society. Social groups in a position of power legitimate "the exisiting relations of domination and subordination" (Dollimore 6) by representing the sectional interests of their class as universal ones and by giving their worldview "the unalterable character of natural law" (Dollimore 7). Recognition of the vested interest behind the dominant images of a historical period is an important concept of ecocriticism because it enables critics to expose the way in which government and business leaders, for example, have consistently created a "unified" vision of national prosperity in order to legitimate economic developments which serve their interests at the expense of environmental protection. I will use this concept in my exploration of the cultural values of wilderness and homesteading fiction in order to show how the dominant image of the prairie as a virgin land of unlimited resources benefitted the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and the coffers of the national treasury while justifying the exploitation of fragile ecosystems.

In spite of their apparently unshakeable positions, dominant cultures give way to oppositional cultures and the balance of social power changes. Ecocriticism owes to cultural materialism this recognition of the unstable structure of power and of the concept of a resistance which allows for the possibility of social change. Society is not a "monolithic power structure" which entirely controls political life, but is made up of "different, often competing elements" (Dollimore 12) which challenge the authority of the dominant culture.

These alternative views change public images of what constitutes legitimate social values and therefore make opposition possible. When people do not feel represented by the values of their culture they protest, "until a system emerges that will accommodate them, and a rhetoric emerges that will describe the new system" (New xxxi). This process of protest, accommodation and rhetorical change can be accounted for by Raymond Williams's theory of oppositional and alternative cultures. Williams notes that the cultural hegemony (or unquestioned belief system) of a society can be challenged and modified by what he calls "alternative" and "oppositional" cultures. Within both alternative and oppositional cultures there are "residual" forms that express the values of earlier cultural formations ("Base and Superstructure" 384) and "emergent" forms that express new values and practices (385). Since no dominant society completely satisfies human need, residual and emergent forms of both alternative and oppositional cultures exist alongside the dominant culture and continually threaten to usurp its position. Lentricchia observes, after Kenneth Burke, that it is these divisions in society that allow for the possibility of social change. Since linguistic symbols of authority can be seized by one group and used against a previously dominant group, alternative and oppositional cultures continually jeopardize the stability of the exisiting power structure: "It is precisely the radical instability (appropriability) of terms like 'rights' or 'the people' that makes for transformation in philosophical and social history. . . ." Social change can occur "when ruling discourse is seized and, in the name of ruling discourse, turned against the rulers" (80). Lentricchia shows how Burke used the history of the term "rights" to illustrate the way in which words can be appropriated by groups who resist the power of dominant authority. Once associated with the divine right of kings, the word "rights" is now being used to empower animal rights and environmental rights activists.

"The way the term 'rights' is decided," Lentricchia notes, "is a sure marker of social change and social, economic, and political power, and where that power lies" (80-1). Dissident groups, by appropriating verbal symbols of authority, thus transform them in order to transfer power from the dominant culture to residual and emergent forms.

Yet another way in which the oppositional critic can challenge the worldview of the dominant culture is by "re-read[ing] culture" (Lentricchia, 15) so as to give a voice to the excluded and the oppressed. By interpreting apparently orthodox texts in radical new ways the critical reader can subvert the hierarchy of values implicit in a conventional reading and thus empower previously marginalized groups. Belsey notes that literary texts contain contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies which allow the critic to transform their meanings: "The role of ideology is to suppress these contradictions in the interests of the preservation of the existing social formation, but their presence ensures that it is always possible, with whatever difficulty, to identify them, to recognize ideology for what it is, and to take an active part in transforming it by producing new meanings" (Critical Practice 45-6). This process, known as deconstruction, provides a way to recognize, and to reject, the ideology embedded in a text. By identifying its contradictions, the critic points to the existence of multiple meanings within an apparently harmonious text and thus opens it to the possibility of a radical re-reading (Belsey, Critical Practice 104, 109).

Deconstruction provides a way of interpreting conservative literary texts "against the grain" of the dominant ideology. Terry Eagleton's delightfully idiosyncratic description of its radical potential suggests that it allows the reader to invert the author's intention and to construct new meaning:

> Deconstruction is in one sense an extraordinarily modest proposal: a sort of

> patient, probing reformism of the text, which is not, so to speak, to be confronted over the barricades but cunningly waylaid in the corridors and suavely chivvied into revealing its ideological hand. Stoically convinced of the unbreakable grip of the metaphysical closure, the deconstructionist, like any responsible trade union bureaucrat confronting management, must settle for that and negotiate what he or she can within the left-overs and stray contingencies casually unabsorbed by the textual power system. But to say no more than this is to do deconstruction a severe injustice. For it ignores that other face of deconstruction which is its hair-raising **radicalism**--the nerve and daring with which it knocks the stuffing out of every smug concept and leaves the well-groomed text shamefully dishevelled. It ignores, in short, the **madness** and violence of deconstruction, its scandalous urge to think the unthinkable, the flamboyance with which it poses itself on the very brink of meaning and dances there, pounding away at the crumbling cliff-edge beneath its feet and prepared to fall with it into the sea of unlimited semiosis or schizophrenia. (Walter Benjamin 134)

The text, in this view, does not contain a stable body of meaning, but can be interpreted from a variety of ideological positions. As anyone familiar with literary criticism realizes, there are almost as many interpretations of a major work such as Hamlet as there are Shakespearean critics. Although there are gifted scholars who write with brilliance and verve, and literary hacks who state the obvious, there are no "correct" critical views; the structural and thematic complexity of good Literature (with a capital L) opens it to the possibility of multiple readings. The conservative and uncomplicated nature of popular

romantic fiction, however, makes it difficult to justify a radical interpretation as long as the critic works within the perimeters of the author's field of vision. Deconstruction allows the enterprising critic to distance herself from the strictures of the text, to "knock the stuffing out of every smug concept" by exposing the limitations and the inconsistencies of the worldview they embody. No longer limited by the ideology of the author, she can use the text against itself to invert the moral order of the novel's fictional world.

Deconstruction in its purest form, however, is incompatible with ecocriticism because the conflicting textual forces which allow the critic to subvert the author's ideological intent also prevent her from assigning fixed meaning to alternative interpetations. The refusal of deconstructive theorists to recognize the existence of absolute moral grounds outside the text (Abrams 226) limits the potential of deconstruction to serve as an agent of social criticism. If the moral order of the text can be inverted, the resulting new order can also be inverted and subverted in an endless series of deconstructions. Belsey's and Eagleton's use of a modified form of deconstruction to undermine conservative ideologies, while it departs from Jacques Derrida's "axial proposition that there is nothing outside the text" (qtd. in Abrams 225), moves literary criticism outside the abstract world of theory into the arena of politics and radical social change. It rejects the moral anarchism inherent in the work of thinkers like Derrida and thus provides a way of reading literature compatible with a literary theory grounded in the principles of bioregionalism, deep ecology and ecofeminism.

I use a variation of deconstruction to analyze, critically, the distribution of power in the two major forms of early prairie fiction--the wilderness romance and the homesteading

romance[4]. Part I looks at novels set in a "virgin" country on the eve of agricultural development and industrialization. It shows the way in which writers set up an opposition between the values of wildness and the values of civilization, and the way in which they empower representatives of civilization at the expense of aboriginal people and Nature. These novels privilege European culture above local, indigenous cultures. They glorify the "valiant" fur trader, extol the Christian missionary, praise the members of the North West Mounted Police, romanticize the railroad builder and pay tribute to the men of "strength and vision" who develop the mineral and timber resources of the West. Most of them also denounce the barbarism of aboriginal people unconverted to Christianity and condemn Native resistance to compulsory assimilation. Part II considers prairie homesteading fiction. It looks at the pejorative treatment of "backward" peasant cultures and at the way in which writers privilege "progressive" farmers who break and till large land holdings, practice the

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[4]Although I refer throughout this study to "prairie" fiction, I include the work of British and American writers who set their novels on the Canadian prairies. Some of these writers, such as Ralph Connor and Nellie McClung, were enormously popular in western Canada. Others, such as Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, were widely read "at home" in England. Yet others--such as James Oliver Curwood and Hulbert Footner--were best-selling authors in their American homeland. Collectively, they were highly influential in determining Western attitudes to the prairie landscape. All of the writers were published during a period of widespread American and British immigration; whether or not they were widely read in Canada, they helped to encourage (or discourage) prospective settlers and to influence their expectations and behavior. Even juvenile fiction, such as C. L. Johnstone's novel for British boys, The Young Emigrants, helped to create interest in emigration to the colonies. These novels thus played an important role in Canadian social history.

My primary source of bibliographic information on early prairie fiction was Bruce Braden Peel's A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953 and his 1963 Supplement. I am also indebted to the bibliographies in Dick Harrison's Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction, Laurence Ricou's Vertical Man / Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction and Eric Callum Thompson's unpublished dissertation, "The Prairie Novel in Canada: A Study in Changing Form & Perception". Although I did not read all the fiction published prior to 1930, my texts include both the best-known early prairie novels and a generous cross-section of other fictional works.

values of the Protestant work ethic and adopt the technology of industrialized agriculture. Part II also explores some of the early opposition to patriarchal values; it looks at novels which would replace the "masculine" domination of woman and Nature with the "feminine" values of compassion, connection and community. The emphasis throughout my critique of both wilderness and homesteading fiction is on identifying the oppressive patterns of power which enabled European settlers to impose Western civilization on wild Nature and on the aboriginal inhabitants of the Canadian prairies.

The novels discussed in the following chapters must be viewed against this transition from sustainable wilderness ecosystems and a hunter-gatherer economy to the private land holdings and industrialized agriculture of a mercantile society. Between 1856 and the mid-1920s the prairies experienced a major influx of European settlers. These immigrants transformed the landscape and established their schools, churches, legal system and governing bodies as the dominant social and political institutions. By 1929 immigration had slowed to a trickle, but the cultural pattern of a growth-oriented, "progressive" society had already been established. Gasoline-powered tractors had mechanized agriculture, automobiles and telephones had ended the isolation of rural settlers, and the War had created a prosperous wheat economy. The wilderness and the homesteading romance celebrated this triumph of Western man over his environment. Not until the mid-1920s was its idealized version of the pioneer quest challenged by the introduction of literary realism. My study spans this period between the "romantic" fur-trade era and the grim years of the great Depression.

Recent interest in revisioning the past has a lot to do with the discontents of the present. Shaken by a growing awareness of ozone depletion, species extinction, loss of soil

fertility, global warming and other ecological disasters, we look to the past to tell us where we went wrong and to point us in a new direction. The value of history, as Hayden White observes in the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is its contribution to the solution of problems that we face in our own time. My study explores the history of Western settlement in an attempt to find these solutions. By disclosing the oppressive patterns of anthropocentrism, patriarchy and Eurocentrism in early prairie fiction I expose the need for alternative and oppositional cultures. Ecofeminism, deep ecology and bioregionalism provide the ideological grounds for an ecologically stable society, and the analytical tools of cultural materialism identify a pattern of resistance to the dominant culture. Together they create an ecocritical literary theory that can deconstruct the past and provide a positive vision for a sustainable future.

PART I

THE WILDERNESS ROMANCE

Chapter One

Transcendence and Redemption in the Wilderness Romance: Privileging the Civilized World

> . . . the inheritance of property by itself is very far from an evil; for without the accumulation of capital the arts could not progress; and it is chiefly through their power that the civilized races have extended, and are now everywhere extending their range, so as to take the place of the lower races.
> - Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, 1871[1]

The conservative nature of the romance novel makes it an ideal form for the expression of the Victorian values that influenced the development of the Canadian West. Although it appears to reject the staid conventions of domesticity in favour of hunting buffalo and living with untamed Nature, the wilderness romance actually shares with its literary counterpart, what I will call the homesteading romance, a social and economic worldview that promoted the agricultural settlement of the prairies. Two characteristics of the romance, in particular, enabled it to serve as immigration propaganda for the West: its emphasis on human transcendence of the natural, physical world and its use of the quest motif to validate the economic and spiritual values of Western culture. By emphasizing society's transcendence of Nature, the wilderness romance established the superiority of

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[1]p. 137.

civilization to wildness. By emphasizing social redemption via maintenance of law and order and the conversion of Indians to Christianity, the wilderness quest privileged the values of Victorian culture above the values of the indigenous people who made the prairies home. In its portrayal of the West as a vast reserve of untapped resources patiently awaiting the guiding hand of civilization, it prepared the way for European settlement.

This elevation of European civilization above wild Nature and aboriginal culture accounts for the lack of ideological difference between the wilderness romance and the homesteading romance. Although William Spengemann argues that the American romantic novel's roots in two different fictional poetics accounts for the opposing worldviews inherent in what he calls the adventure romance and the domestic romance, no such distinction exists between the comparable forms of the western Canadian novel. The adventure romance, Spengemann says, emerged from "a poetics of adventure, invented by the American travel-writers to portray the metamorphosing world that appears to someone who stands on its moving frontier," while the domestic romance emerged from "a poetics of domesticity, devised by certain highly influential English novelists to restrain and discredit this potentially subversive vision of reality" (3). This distinction is not valid for the Canadian romance because Canadians have never shared the American frontier myth of the West as a region outside the boundaries of civilization. The Canadian West was developed, as Dick Harrison notes, as "a series of orderly colonies where social institutions were commonly installed in advance of settlement" (Introduction, Crossing Frontiers 5-6). Thanks to the North West Mounted Police and to the early missionaries, the Canadian prairies did not experience the lawlessness and absolute freedom of the American western frontier. There was no "metamorphosing world" which could seduce the young and the unwary from the

paths of Victorian rectitude. By the time European settlers arrived to take up their homesteads, the forces of imperial law and Western Christianity had already won the West and had prepared the way for the establishment of a culture based upon the Victorian valuation of hard work, economic aggression and competitiveness (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 95)[2]. This culture, faithful to its British roots, was more conservative and more hierarchical in nature than that of its republican neighbour to the south. Much of the ideological difference between the Canadian and the American wilderness romance, indeed, can be explained by the difference in the political histories of the two countries. The United States emerged as a revolutionary nation "created by a declaration of independence based on man's inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," whereas Canada emerged as an anti-revolutionary nation created "by an act of the British parliament based on the ideals of peace, order and good government" (Harrison, Crossing Frontiers 5). Not surprisingly, then, the Canadian wilderness romance had little tolerance for the chaotic wildness of untamed Nature. It did not inspire an anarchist vision of unrestrained freedom in the North West, but reflected the social order of a hierarchical "old world" civilization.

The terminology that I use in describing the domestication of Nature[3] reveals the

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[2]European immigrants, of course, did not **introduce** law and order, but replaced indigenous social practices and traditions with the spiritual and secular institutions of British civilization.

[3]I use the word Nature to refer to wild, unbroken land and to the indigenous, non-domesticated plant and animal species that inhabited it prior to European settlement. I exclude aboriginal people from my definition; although they lived in harmony with the natural world prior to contact with Western civilization, by the late 1800s their use of imported technology and their growing dependence on agriculture for food emphasized their difference from non-human Nature. Like Stan Rowe in Home Place, I spell Nature with a capital N in order to emphasize the primacy of its splace in the cosmic scheme of things.

European roots of prairie society. European immigrants replaced the subsistence economy and wilderness life of a nomadic hunting and gathering people with an export-oriented economy based upon large-scale resource exploitation, industrial agriculture, urban development and private land ownership. Especially influential in setting this course were settlers from **western Europe**, who imposed upon the "new" land the cultural patterns of their own materialistic, "success"-oriented society. ("Galicians," or eastern European immigrants, were marginalized by the more "progressive," economically-ambitious western European settlers; their peasant values of self-sufficiency and frugality, therefore, had little influence on the general direction of society.) Since the dominant culture was **British** (or, more particularly, **English**--see Rea's "The Roots of Prairie Society"), Anglo-Saxon norms and institutions were especially powerful; more than the values and structures of other European nations, they determined the shape of prairie society. Finally, late **Victorian** culture had an important impact on prairie history. Queen Victoria ruled until 1901; the sanguine temperament and materialistic values that characterized her reign (Altick 107) influenced both the writers (most of them of British origin) and the reading public of the Canadian West. The different shades of meaning inherent in these words-- "European", "Western", "British", "English" and "Victorian"--however, does not conceal the important similarity among them; western Canadian society developed in response to the expectations and practises of an "old world" culture bent on economic progress.

Prairie writers have in different periods assigned a variety of names to the earliest inhabitants of the North American plains. Indians, red men, savages, native people, aboriginal people, indigenous people, First Nations people--and their mixed-blood relatives the Métis, half-breeds and **Bois-Brulés**--all are representatives of a culture rooted in the

prairie landscape. I continue to use the old terms--Indian, red man and savage--in spite of their Eurocentric origins because they are the words that the authors of wilderness romances commonly used. There are no First Nations people in R. M. Ballantyne's novels, only Christian Indians and heathen savages. "Native," "aboriginal" and "indigenous" I use interchangeably in the Oxford English Dictionary spirit of their definitions--the words refer to people whose history in a place predates colonization (usually European) by thousands of years. I also use "First Nations", a term by which Canadian indigenous people describe themselves. "Half-breed" originally referred to people of mixed British and First Nations ancestry, "**Bois-Brulés**" and "Métis" to people of French and First Nations origin; the word "Métis" now encompasses both groups, but I use all three terms interchangeably. Although the history of some of these names has given them pejorative connotations, I deliberately use a verbal blend of "savages" and "indigenous people" in order to reflect the differing attitudes of prairie writers to the people of Canada's First Nations.

The transcendent nature of the romance suggests one way in which that literary genre works to privilege civilization above wildness, culture above Nature. The Romance, as Hayden White observes, elevates man above the natural world:

> The Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it--the sort of drama associated with the grail legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology. It is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall. (Metahistory 8-9)

White's use of Christian imagery in his definition of the romance draws attention to the romance writer's rejection of the world of experience in favour of a higher world which exists apart from the material universe. Christian mythology clearly establishes the superiority of this non-material world to the physical world of Nature. Earth, according to its worldview, is a place of darkness and suffering where humans are "imprisoned" until death enables them to ascend to the spiritual realm of Heaven. Although it is an oversimplification to say that Nature and wildness are equated with earth, whereas culture and civilization are equated with Heaven, Christianity's emphasis on transcending the physical world suggests that the trees and flowers, the animals and the rocks and the land formations that are part of Nature are inferior to the ethereal beings who inhabit Heaven. White's definition of romance, indeed, suggests that the term "wilderness romance" is an oxymoron since the romance privileges the spiritual realm above the wilderness which constitutes the "world of experience" which the hero must transcend. This association of wilderness with the mundane earthly sphere is so widespread that The Oxford English Dictionary acknowleges it in one of its definitions of the word. "Wilderness" is "[s]omething figured as a region of a wild or desolate character, or in which one wanders or loses one's way; in religious use applied to the present world or life as contrasted with heaven or the future life." By associating it with desolation and with loss of direction, and by contrasting it to heaven, the English language has traditionally defined wilderness as an undesirable state.

This privileging of civilization above wildness is often not apparent in the western Canadian wilderness romance because the plot of the novel emphasizes adventure in a vast, sparsely-populated country far from the towns, cities and fenced farmsteads that the reader identifies with civilization. In a typical romance the hero journeys through the wilderness

and experiences a series of adventures in his encounters with wild Nature. Buffalo hunts, prairie fires, blizzards and summer storms, food shortages, encounters with hostile Indians (or, occasionally, with white desperadoes) and encounters with fierce wild animals such as cougars and grizzly bears are recurring episodes in novels of this genre. Indeed, a sequence of these episodes normally constitutes the major plot of the wilderness romance. Because these adventures are exciting and because they encourage the reader's emotional identification with the hero, they are what the reader remembers when s/he later recalls the novel. Their emotional impact is often heightened by vivid descriptions of the freedom of wilderness life and by romantic images of Nature, the noble savage and the untamed, unbroken land.

At the heart of the wilderness romance, however, is a deep-rooted belief in the value of economic progress. In spite of idyllic images of pristine lakes and rivers, vast expanses of unfenced prairie, noble redmen and life in harmony with wild Nature, the dominant picture of the West was of a source of prosperity to enterprising immigrants. The romantic images of the prairie and of its aboriginal inhabitants which appear to validate wildness actually serve to disguise the pragmatic materialism that exists below the surface of the wilderness romance. Eagleton notes a similar explanation for the incongrous mixture of Romantic humanism and utilitarian bourgeois ideology that pervades the British novel from George Eliot to D. H. Lawrence. In an analysis of George Eliot's fiction he observes that Eliot's novels attempt to resolve a conflict between two incompatible forms of mid-Victorian ideology: "between a progressively muted Romantic individualism concerned with the untrammelled evolution of the 'free spirit', and certain 'higher', corporate ideological modes" (Criticism and Ideology 111) such as scientific rationalism. Her novels attempt to reconcile

a pragmatic, materialist ideology based upon faith in rational, scientific thought with a romantic idealization of spiritual freedom and the unfettered human spirit. Eagleton insists that the "impoverished empiricism" of the dominant British worldview needed the "fertile symbolic resources" (Criticism and Ideology 102-3) of Romantic humanism in order to make acceptable the inequitable social and economic relationships inherent in Victorian capitalism. The wilderness romance attempts to resolve a similar confict between the incompatible ideals of preservation of wildness and development of a prosperous economy. A commercial ideology based on the single concept of economic development needed the Edenic imagery of the wilderness romance in order to obscure the exploitation of Nature and of aboriginal people inherent in its vision of success.

A careful study of the wilderness romance suggests that the quest structure of the novel validates civilization by endorsing its values in the hero's pursuit and achievement of his quest. This quest, as Northrop Frye notes, is to redeem society or to obtain wealth, "which in mythopoeic romance often means wealth in its ideal forms, power and wisdom" (193). The object of the quest, whether it is for the personal benefit of the hero or for the redemption of society, symbolizes the values of the dominant culture. What the hero considers worth fighting for, in other words, constitutes the author's statement of the social good. This social good, in the western Canadian wilderness romance, is tied to the values of Victorian society. Most of the twelve romances that I study in Part One have as the object of their quest some form of social redemption. The heroes strive to bring the light of Christianity and British culture, with all their civilizing influences, to the darkness of the heathen wilderness. Alternatively, they boldly endeavour to quell native rebellion, enforce law and order or develop the economic resources of the "virgin" country. Only two of the

wilderness romances emphasize more personal quests, and both of these involve the white protagonists in the acquisition of "wisdom" that sanctions the ideology of the dominant social order; the wilderness is a fine place to explore when you are young, they learn, but maturity requires that adults accept the responsibility of life in the civilized world.

All twelve of these wilderness romances conclude with the triumph of civilization over wildness. After his adventures in the wilderness the youthful explorer returns home to take his rightful place in society, the Indian hero continues the good work of the missionary in a wilderness transformed by Christianity and the Mounted Policeman views the fruits of his labour in the prosperous farmsteads and rolling wheatfields that have replaced Indian camps and "uninhabited" plains. The wilderness romance thus "lets imagination roam into the farthest reaches of daring-do [sic], but in the end brings emotions back to the sanity of a stable society" (Miller 248). Because it does not allow for the possibility of adopting new values which might be more appropriate to the prairie bioregion, values such as those found in the traditional native worldview, it does not challenge the supremacy of the dominant Victorian culture. By representing economic development, conventional Christianity and the maintenance of British law as the only possible basis for the new society being created in the West, the wilderness romance helped to legitimize European settlement and the development of an agricultural and industrial economy.

My study is based upon the premise that one important way to read the "meaning" of history is in the context of a struggle for power between competing interest groups. The period of Western agricultural settlement is not a unified entity reflecting a single worldview. Instead it can be read, in mythic terms, as a battle for supremacy between the forces of British civilization and the forces of Nature. Whether or not romance writers were aware of

its strategic value, their unified vision of an emerging Western civilization on the prairies worked to empower the forces of this civilization. Their accounts of the "new land" discounted the existence of an ancient culture which had dominated the prairies for more than ten thousand years (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 11). By failing to acknowledge the oppositional views of native people or to consider the inherent rights of plants and animals, romance writers helped to legitimize the destruction of the wilderness environment that was necessary for the survival of native culture and untamed Nature.

A legend recounted in one of these romances, Edgar Ryerson Young's Oowikapun or How the Gospel Reached the Nelson River Indians (1896), expresses in figurative language the power inherent in the dominant European culture. An old Indian medicine man, Mookoomis, tells Oowikapun a story that explains how the white man came to dominate the earth. After creating the black man, the white man and the red man, Mookoomis says, the Great Spirit discovered that his creatures were unhappy because they had nothing to do. He promptly decided to give them work to occupy their idle hours. One day, then, he brought them three parcels, for which they cast lots to decide who would choose first. The black man drew for the first choice. He chose the biggest parcel, which contained axes, hoes, spades and other tillage implements. The red man made the second choice, and he selected the second largest bundle, which contained bows and arrows, spears, knives and other hunting equipment. The poor white man was left with the smallest parcel, which contained only a book:

> "When the black man and the red man saw that the white man had nothing but a book they laughed out loudly, and ridiculed him very much. But the Great Spirit reproved them, and said, 'Wait a while, and perhaps you will think

> differently.' And so they now do; for it has come to pass that because of the possession of that book the white man has become so learned and wise that he is now much stronger than the others, and seems to be able to make himself master of the other races, and to take possession of all lands." (95)

One of the things that is remarkable about this story, in addition to the old Indian's tone of complacency, is the way in which the author uses it to obliterate many centuries of white cultural history. Prior to the development of agriculture, most Europeans lived as hunters who tracked game in the vast forests that covered the continent. Their descendants, until well into the sixteenth century, lived in rural communities and engaged in subsistence agriculture. Much of European history is the history of hunters and peasants whose means of livelihood ensured daily interaction with Nature and whose worldview included the concept of a living cosmos composed of connected and interdependent forms of Nature. Not until the seventeenth-century transformation of the "organic cosmos" into what Carolyn Merchant calls a "mechanistic universe" filled with "dead and passive matter" (103) did the dominant European worldview emphasize power over Nature. I suggest that it is this power which is symbolized by the book in the old medicine man's story. The black man and the red man, the story suggests, are condemned by their intellectual limitations to a powerless life in which they must struggle to wrest a living from Nature. The white man, however, is blessed by the gift of rational thought and scientific wisdom, which gives him the power to dominate other humanity and the world of Nature that they share. By denying the existence of white society's historical connection to Nature and by accepting as natural the superiority of civilization over subsistence agriculture and wilderness life, Young empowers the dominant culture by granting it the immutable status of historic destiny.

This power is also expressed in The Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of "wild" and "civilized." By making a negative value judgement part of the definition of "wild" and a positive value judgement part of the definition of "civilized," the English language itself helps to privilege civilization above wildness. Most of the adjectives used to define "wild" suggest that it is unruly, unproductive and untrustworthy. A wild place is "waste, desert, desolate." Wild persons are "[u]ncivilized, savage; uncultured, rude . . . [and] rebellious", or they are "demented" or "[e]xtremely foolish and unreasonable." Wild can be used as a synonym for "[f]ierce, savage, ferocious; furious, violent, destructive, cruel." Although it can also be used in a positive sense to describe a person who is "[a]rtless, free, unconventional, fanciful, or romantic in style," most of the definitions equate "wild" and "wildness" with an undesirable landscape or with an undesirable social or emotional state. In their suggestion that "wildness" is a state of chaos in which humans are subject to forces beyond their control, they evoke fears and prejudices long associated with untamed Nature. The early Teutonic and Norse root of "wilderness," Roderick Nash explains, is "will," which meant self-willed or uncontrollable. "From 'willed' came the adjective 'wild' used to convey the idea of being lost, unruly, disordered, or confused" (1). Wilderness, in the popular imagination, became an "alien environment where the civilization that normally orders and controls [human] life is absent" (2). Already disoriented by the strange landscape and customs of a new country, the European immigrant readily accepted this view of wilderness as a state of darkness and chaos[4].

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[4]I use both "wilderness" and "wildness" to describe the early prairie landscape. Although both terms carried pejorative connotations to an immigrant people bent on settlement, the former (to me) suggests European perception of the undeveloped prairies as an uninhabited place while the latter term refers to a land where humans live with untamed Nature.

The English language, on the other hand, has defined "civilization" as the antithesis of wilderness and has assigned to it all the positive qualities that wildness lacks. Civilization is a "developed or advanced state of human society" (The Oxford English Dictionary). To civilize means to "bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life, and thus elevate in the scale of humanity." To become civilized is to become "elevated" and to "behave decently." Again, the adjectives (and verbs) used in these definitions are not neutral in tone. Words like "advanced" and "elevated" confer status in a hierarchical society that values progress, development and upward mobility. They express approval of the concept of civilization and distrust of wilderness and wildness. "The control of meanings . . . is political power . . ." ("Literature" 403), Belsey notes. How we define words helps to determine both our political practices and our social behavior. If wildness is, by definition, inferior to civilization, then it becomes morally acceptable to destroy it on civilization's behalf.

In the following pages I will discuss the way in which the authors of early western Canadian wilderness romances privilege civilization above wildness. Although they portray wilderness as a source of both beauty and freedom, their belief in the greater virtue of economic development led them to empower the values of "progress" at the expense of wild Nature and First Nations cultures. Their heroes view wilderness as the locale for youthful adventure, as a battle ground on which souls are won for Christ, as the fearsome home of wild beasts and barbarians, as a source of raw materials and furture prosperity, and as the soon-to-be-filled breadbasket of an Empire. Blinded by a Eurocentric faith in the superiority

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Aboriginal people did not perceive themselves as dwelling in a wilderness; as Dene writer Joanne Barnaby notes, "anywhere we go on the land is our home" (40). Native people saw the mountains, forests and plains of their homeland as "essential elements in the native habitat and part of our Mother Earth" (Erasmus 97), not as desolate areas of threatening wilderness.

of Western civilization, they cannot see the limitations of a worldview that grants them dominion over both Nature and the savage "other." The history of the Canadian West in the years before major European settlement, as it is told by the writers of popular romance, is a triumphant tale of victorious man conquering the wilderness.

Chapter Two

A Quest for Wisdom: Civilization vs. Wildness in The Young Fur Traders and Red Cloud

> The fundamental reason for preserving whatever wildness remains on land and in water is the symbolism of the act, the implicit recognition of values beyond humanity, something other than ourselves that ought not to be destroyed, an expression of wonder and awe before the marvelous world that created us and that, once gone, we cannot recreate.
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> - Stan Rowe, "Wilderness as Home Place" in Home Place: Essays on Ecology, 1990[1]

Nowhere is the wilderness romance's ambivalence to wildness more apparent than in two of our earliest novels, R. M. Ballantyne's The Young Fur Traders or, Snowflakes and Sunbeams: A Tale of the Far North, published in 1856, and William F. Butlers's Red Cloud: A Tale of the Great Prairie[2], published in 1882. The heroes of these novels journey into the wilderness on quests of self-discovery which end in their return to a civilization based upon the commercial exploitation of natural resources. Although both authors create Edenic images of the prairie landscape and of life in the untamed North West, the conclusions to their stories suggest that the wilderness experience is valuable primarily because it teaches boys to become strong men who can harness wild Nature and teach it to do their bidding.

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[1]p. 32.

[2]This novel was also published by Burns and Oates of London as Red Cloud the Solitary Sioux.

The incompatibility of their view of the West as both a wilderness paradise and a fount of prosperity is the source of the ambivalence to wildness inherent in the novels. Butler laments the destruction of a wild, free life on the unfenced prairies whereas Ballantyne exults in man's dominion over Nature, but the final impact of the novels is the same. Civilized man, regretfully or joyfully, must exercise his rightful mastery over the "new" lands of the Canadian West.

The Young Fur Traders is a boy's adventure story which emphasizes the wholesome, character-building quality of life in the northern woods. Charley Kennedy and Harry Somerville, teenage boys who are bored with life in the "populous paradise" (11) of the Red River Settlement, become fur traders for the Hudson's Bay Company in the wilds of the North West[3]. Although Charley's father has tried to discourage his son by describing the hardships of his own life as a fur trader, his account of travelling for weeks through an unmapped country, hunting and fishing for food, building his own house and fighting with Indians and grizzly bears serves to make Charley even more determined to go North. The dangers and hardships that the boys subsequently encounter during their fur trade years teach them the wisdom and strength that are the symbolic object of their wilderness quest.

The rough life of the wilderness, Ballantyne's novel suggests, turns boys into men. The Reverend Mr. Addison articulates this goal when he tells a heartbroken Kate that the change of life will do her brother good: "Charley will return to us again ere long, improved, I trust, both physically and mentally" (71). The maturity and wisdom that he and Harry

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[3]Ballantyne recorded his own experience as a fur trader for the Hudson's Bay Company in the North West in Hudson's Bay; or Everyday Life in the Wilds of North America (1848).

acquire as a result of their adventures constitute the symbolic achievement of their quest. The boys go into the wilderness imbued with enthusiasm and the spirit of adventure, but lacking both skill and judgement. Their return to the Red River area as strong, capable young men suggests that the wilderness has made them mentally and physically fit for the responsible positions which they then obtain with the Company.

The dual nature of this achievement--the acquisition of both rugged manliness and the commercial skills that prepare the boys to take their place in the economy of the fur trade--is echoed in Ballantyne's descriptions of the landscape of the North West. His countryside combines the pastoral beauty and fertility of a Garden of Eden with the harsh, savage beauty of untamed Nature. In a description of a lake scene somewhere in the area of the Saskatchewan River, for example, the narrator suggests that its "picturesque" quality and "unsurpassed" beauty result from a blend of ruggedness and luxuriant fertility. Although there are "rocky and barren" promontories, a "savage-looking" gorge and "barren and solitary" islands that are "bald and grotesque" in outline, the harsh qualities of the landscape are redeemed by the wooded hills, the distant "meadow-like plain" and the islands covered with "luxuriant vegetation" (234) and abundant waterfowl. The scene thus evokes, simultaneously, the images of bleakness and desolation associated with wildness and the pastoral imagery associated with the gardens and tilled fields of civilization.

In commenting on the source of pleasure in a similar scene, an Arcadian valley which Charley and a companion overlook when they camp one night, the narrator observes that the landscape unites a vast extent of rich natural resources with "much that was grand and savage":

> It filled the mind with the calm satisfaction that is experienced when one

> gazes on wide lawns, studded with noble trees; on spreading fields of waving grain that mingle with stream and copse, rock and dell, vineyard and garden, of the cultivated lands of civilized men; while it produced that exulting throb of freedom which stirs man's heart to its centre, when he casts a first glance over miles and miles of broad lands that are yet unowned, unclaimed; that yet lie in the unmutilated beauty with which the beneficent Creator originally clothed them. . . . (125)

Although the savage charm of "unmutilated" beauty attracts Ballantyne's heroes to the wilderness, they are also attracted by a pastoral vision of the "cultivated lands of civilized men." The dualistic nature of this response helps to explain the ambivalence toward wildness inherent in the wilderness romance. The young men who exult in the freedom of vast stretches of land that are "yet unowned, unclaimed" are simultaneously attracted to the promise of wheat fields, vineyards and gardens implicit in the fertility and Edenic beauty of the park-like landscape.

This ambivalence towards wildness is echoed in Ballantyne's account of his heroes' responses to fur-trade life. Although it offers them freedom and adventure, it also prepares them for their return to the comfortable, settled world of British civilization. The young fur traders explore the wilderness by foot and canoe, hunt and trap wild animals in the forest, explore uncharted water, escape an attack by a murderous Indian, set up fur trading posts and engage in other heroic exploits. Charley insists that this Spartan regime of rough fare and "rough beds under the starry sky" (200) is much easier on the constitution than the soft life of civilization, which makes a man stagnate, body and soul: "Ah! there's nothing like roughing it, Harry my boy. Why, I am thriving on it; growing like a young walrus; eating like a

Canadian **voyageur**, and sleeping like a top" (201). The enforced simplicity of wilderness life gives a man the strength, courage and self-reliance to survive encounters with savage Indians, hostile beasts and dangerous rapids--and to survive the tough competition of a commercial economy when he returns to his rightful place in society.

The ambiguous status of the voyageurs, who personify the manly spirit of the wilderness, further illustrates the author's ambivalent attitude towards wildness. In a fashion befitting the writer of boys' adventure stories, Ballantyne conjures up stirring scenes of strong, brave men paddling the tree-lined rivers of the North West. The young voyageurs are a fine set of "picturesque manly fellows" (55), the older voyageurs a "sterling band, of which every man was a hero" (56), the principal steersmen and guides "men of renown, to whom the others bowed as oracles, or looked up to as fathers" (57). This picture of the noble voyageur, akin to the picture of the noble savage uncorrupted by civilization that was perpetuated by romantic idealists in the early modern era (White, Tropics 171), glorifies wilderness life and the cultural primitivism it engendered. It suggests that a life spent in "roaming the trackless wilderness" (57) makes men strong, courageous and wise. Implicit in Ballantyne's tale, however, is a class system that privileges the clerks and traders above the voyageur and the woodsman. Although Jacques is forty-five years old and a skilled hunter and woodsman, he respectfully uses the title "master" or "mister" when he talks to seventeen-year-old Charley. Although the voyageurs are admirable fellows, they ply the oars of the Company transport boats while the clerks, traders and other "gentlemen" travel on a couch of blankets in the stern. Much as Ballantyne admired the men who transported the furs and who guided white travellers through the wilderness, he accepted the superior status of the missionaries and the traders-- spiritual and secular representatives of the economically

developed West-- who brought civilization to the prairie wilderness.

Ballantyne further privileges civilization above wildness by endowing his aboriginal and mixed-blood protagonists with the economic, religious and social values of Victorian culture. Unlike Butler, who emphasizes the traditional skills of Red Cloud and his friends, Ballantyne emphasizes the similarity of his Indian and half-breed heroes to white people. Charley, whose British father married a half-breed woman, is indistinguishable from a white boy. Indeed, the author frequently draws attention to his whiteness. Near the end of the novel, for example, when Harry and Charley are reunited after a long absence, the narrator's description of an almost unrecognizable Charley emphasizes his **white** qualities:

> In general appearance, he looked like an Indian; but, though the face was burnt by exposure to a hue that nearly equalled the red skins of the natives, a strong dash of pink in it, and the mass of fair hair which encircled it, proved that . . . its owner was a **white** man. . . . His address and language, on approaching the young men, put the question of his being a **white** man beyond a doubt. (240-1; emphasis the author's)

Considering that Charley has a Métis mother, this emphasis upon his being a white man draws attention to the author's use of **white** as an adjective signifying approbation. Charley is a good fellow, just like the British schoolboy who reads the novel and who is clearly intended to identify with him, and therefore Charley is white. His sister Kate is a sweet, docile model of Victorian girlhood. Redfeather, Indian friend and companion to the boys, is a Christian who speaks English, reads and writes, and, as the narrator points out approvingly, is hard working, modest and obliging (103). By identifying the "good" characters with whiteness and with the social values of Victorian civilization, the author suggests their

superiority to the traditional Indian and Métis values associated with wildness.

Ballantyne further privileges civilization by associating it with Christianity, which was such an integral part of the Victorian worldview that its superiority to other forms of religious practise was never questioned. Redfeather accepts the missionary's view that they need a guide to lead them to the happy hunting grounds, and that there is "but one guide, whose name . . . [is] Jesus" (147). Christianity, however, means far more than accepting Christ as a personal saviour. The missionary is not only a spiritual guide; he also leads his people on the path to civilization. As well as teaching them "the great truths of Christianity," this "excellent man" persuades them to settle around the mission station, teaches them to read and write in their own langauge, establishes both a church and a school and superintends the building of houses for people who "had lived up to that time in tents." Under such management, the narrator says, "the village flourished." Although it does not increase very rapidly "owing to the almost unconquerable aversion of North American Indians to take up settled habitation" (226), it becomes a bright spot of Christian civilization in a heathen wilderness.

Ballantyne uses the power of education and class to legitimize his equation of Christianity with civilization. In a passage which shows the superior power of the missionary, Pastor Conway tells the woodsman Jacques that he plans to go to those Indians who will not come to him at the mission station. Jacques thinks this is a good idea because it is in the nature of Indians, he says, to be hunters rather than settlers. The language and structure of his argument with the pastor clearly illustrates the author's approval of the latter's position:

> "It has always seemed to me a kind o' madness . . . in you pastors, thinkin' to

> make the redskins come an' settle round you like so many squaws, and dig up an' grub at the ground, when it's quite clear that their natur' and the natur' o' things about them meant them to be hunters. An' surely since the Almighty made them hunters, He intended them to be hunters, an' won't refuse to make them Christians on that account. A redskin's natur' is a huntin' natur', an' nothin' on arth'll every make it anything else."
>
> "There is much truth in what you observe, friend," rejoined the pastor; "but you are not altogether right. Their nature may be changed, although, certainly, nothing on **earth** will change it. Look at the frozen lake. . . . Could anything on earth break up or sink or melt that?"
>
> "Nothin'," replied Jacques, laconically.
>
> "But the warm beams of yon glorious sun can do it," continued the pastor. . . "So it is in regard to man. Nothing on earth can change his heart or alter his nature; but our Saviour, who is called the Sun of righteousness, can." (230)

This passage is important not only because it establishes the desirability of changing the Indian from a wilderness hunter to a civilized settler, but also because it shows the power embedded in the speech of the missionary. There is no intrinsic reason why Christianity is incompatible with wilderness life, yet the structure of the argument--the missionary has the last word--gives the missionary the dominant voice. His reasonable tone and polished, middle-class diction inspire the reader with a confidence that has less to do with his logic than with the power of his class. Christianity and civilization are elevated in status when their champion is a member of the (spiritual) ruling elite.

The return of Charley and Harry to the Red River area--Charley to the management

of Lower Fort Garry and Harry to an "important appointment" in the Red River Colony--concludes their wilderness quest with a return to civilization. The tone of the narrator's commentary summarizes the complacent certainty that any other course of action would be highly unlikely: "So both lads, after their run in the wilds, had come home to settle down as Mr. Grant had prophesied they would" (280). Their wilderness jaunt has been a boyish adventure which has made them men--and which has given them the wisdom to recognize that their true place in life is not in the wilds, but at home in civilization[4].

Butler's response to the untamed wild is much more complex than Ballantyne's; wilderness, in Red Cloud, not only makes men out of boys, but also liberates and ennobles those whom civilization would stifle and corrupt. Although his quest, too, concludes with a return to civilization, Butler does not so much affirm its values as lament the disappearance of wild Nature and noble savage before the onslaught of Victorian culture.

Red Cloud describes the experiences of the unnamed Scottish narrator and his friend Donogh who travel across the prairies with several Indian companions. Although, like the protagonists in The Young Fur Traders, they seek adventure, the symbolic object of their quest is the wisdom of spiritual insight. In the narrator's initial response to the wild prairies he insists that he goes into the wilderness not to seek gold or to hunt or to trap, but in quest

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[4]The novels of John Mackie, a British writer who served in the North West Mounted Police from 1888 to 1893, express a similar view of the West as a setting for romantic escapades. The Devil's Playground: A Story of the Wild Northwest (1894) portrays the Cypress Hills ranch life of well-born English ladies and gentlemen who use the Northwest as a playground for hunting and other sports. Sinners Twain: A Romance of the Great Lone Land (1895) describes the adventures of a beautiful young woman and an NWMP Sergeant torn between duty and love as he pursues her whiskey-smuggling father across a harsh, wintry prairie. Although most of its action takes place in the Cypress Hills area, the novel concludes with the lovers' reunion in a quaint, rose-covered New England farmhouse far removed from the "blizzard-haunted wilderness" (159) of the Canadian West.

of something that he cannot yet name:

> This great untamed wilderness, this home of distance and solitude, this vast unbroken dominion of nature--where no fence crossed the surface of the earth, where plough had never turned, where lakes lay lapped amid shores tenanted only by the moose and the reindeer-- all this endless realm of prairie, forest, rock, and rapid, which yet remains the grandest domain of savage nature in the world, had had for me a charm, not the less seductive because it could not then find expression in words, or give explanation for its fancy. (31-2)

Although the narrator cannot yet identify the object of his search, he knows that it is connected to the **wildness** of the prairies. He associates his quest with solitude and the "unbroken dominion" of savage Nature. Ballantyne's protagonists embark on their quest with the youthful exuberance of boys searching for adventure and excitement. The narrator in Red Cloud, however, views his quest with an almost religious solemnity of purpose. He goes forth "not to annex, to conquer, nor to destroy" (32), but to roam the plains and find meaning in their wildness.

Butler's descriptions of wilderness share with Ballantyne's the evocation of both the savage wild and the pastoral garden, but also emphasize the vastness and the purity of the prairie landscape. Although some of his pictures are of Edenic landscapes that suggest the greenness and ordered neatness of the British countryside, many of his scenes draw attention to the immensity of a vast and treeless land very different from the cultivated fields of home. In one such picture he describes a broad expanse of "treeless waste" (159) which is "almost sublime" in its loneliness and desolation:

> Never before had I beheld so vast an extent of treeless ground. The other

> prairies over which we had journeyed were dwarfed in my mind by the one now before me. I seemed to be standing upon the shore of a rigid sea--an ocean, whose motionless waves of short brown grass appeared to lie in a vast torpor up to, and beyond, the sunset itself; and this sense of enormous space was heightened by the low but profound murmur of the wind as it swept by our standpoint, from vast distance, into distance still as vast. (160)

Butler's language emphasizes the immensity of the prairie. His central metaphor, the sea, suggests to British readers unfamiliar with huge expanses of grassland a sense of their boundless space. This metaphor is reinforced by the repeated use of the adjective "vast" and by the frequent use of spatial referents. These words convey a sense of the freedom that Butler, and other wilderness romance writers, associated with the prairies. Just as the sea promised freedom and adventure to the British boy who rebelled against the limitations of a world made narrow by poverty or social conventions, the prairie offered the freedom of its vast, open spaces to youthful adventurers bored by the restrictions of Victorian society.

Butler's description of another prairie landscape contrasts the peace and tranquility of Nature with the savagery of human society. The narrator reflects upon the difference between the purity and tranquility of the landscape and the evil of the men who have attempted to kill Red Cloud:

> The contrast between its peacefulness and the strife I had just witnessed struck me with profound wonder. Here was a bit of the earth as it came from the Creator's hands, bright with the glow of summer, decked in the dress of leaf and blossom, sweet with the perfume of wild flower, fresh with the breezes of untold distance; and there below the southern horizon, but two days' riding

> away, man's passion, guilt, and greed ruled rampant in the land. (278)

Butler's images evoke a prairie Eden before and after the Fall. Untamed Nature is "bright," "fresh" and "sweet" with the beauty and innocence of a new creation; when touched by the hand of man, however, it is corrupted by his greed and evil passion. This romantic vision of pristine wildness, which permeates Butler's writing, establishes the moral superiority of a wilderness created by God to a civilization created by man.

The vast, unfenced spaces of the prairie landscape and the purity of untamed Nature create the conditions for the life of freedom which the wilderness offers. Red Cloud, the Indian protagonist of Butler's novel, correctly identifies the narrator's love of wildness with this freedom. He says approvingly that the narrator, like himself, loves the wilderness "for its wildness, as a bird loves the air for its freedom" (49). Later, after a season on the prairie, the narrator himself recognizes that it is this freedom which makes his life there so satisfying:

> Donogh and I had in fact been enjoying the utmost bliss of perfect freedom--that only true freedom in life, the freedom of fording streams, crossing prairies, galloping over breezy hilltops, watching wild herds in their daily habits of distance, seeing them trail along slowly into golden sunsets, or file in long procession to some prairie stream for the evening drink; or, better still, marking some stray wolf into a valley where he thought himself unseen, and dashing down upon him with wild hulloo ready for the charge, while the silent echoes wake to the clash of hoof and ring of cheer. (150-1)

The narrator's images of life in the wild evoke in the reader nostalgia for a mythical past in which humans lived in harmony with a natural environment. The daily encounter with wild

Nature broadens the spirits so that men can grasp "the sense of a freedom as boundless as the wilderness itself" (151). This freedom liberates humanity from the tyranny of social conventions and from the petty, mundane concerns of commercial life.

Given Butler's view of the ennobling power of Nature and wildness, it is not surprising that his novel presents a romantically affirmative picture of traditional Indian life. Although Red Cloud speaks English and has enjoyed the "benefits" of a Christian upbringing and an academic education, he leaves civilization in order to live the life of a savage on the western plains. The narrator describes, with obvious admiration, the "unmatched . . . skill" of Red Cloud and his friends in the "work of the wilderness" (60). Their knowledge of wild game makes them hunters who surpass "all other hunters of the earth" (59). Their intimate knowledge of the prairie enables them to recognize even the "most trifling landmarks" (148) years after they last passed along a trail. Red Cloud shows the narrator how to build a cabin, a sled and snowshoes using local materials and simple tools. He teaches him the hunting and trapping skills which he needs in order to feed himself in the wilderness. He even shows him how to ward off starvation by drinking small amounts of blood from his horse when game is scarce. These traditional skills, combined with the "ample resource base" (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 15) which existed prior to European settlement, enabled the natives of the western interior to live comfortably in their wilderness home. Friesen suggests that they "achieved economic, political, and religious arrangements as satisfactory and as conducive to human happiness" (Canadian Prairies 20) as those of any other society[5]. Because they were based

[5]Norbert Welsh's account of his life as a buffalo hunter and trader during the second half of the nineteenth century helps to confirm Friesen's hypothesis. Although Welsh's story (The Last Buffalo Hunter, as told to Mary Weekes in 1931) is doubtlessly coloured by an old man's nostalgia for his youth, it gives a positive view of the nomadic life of Indian and Métis people during the transition between a hunter-gatherer economy and the mercantile economy

upon "successful adaptations to the environment" (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 21) they also enabled the Indian to live an independent and sustainable existence.

As the old Indian's tale in Oowikapun points out, however, these skills do not empower individuals in a society dominated by the intellectual and technological skills which have enabled Western man to conquer Nature. Inherent in Butler's praise of traditional Indian life is his recognition of a political weakness which leads to its destruction. Although the Indian's skills enable him to live comfortably in the prairie wilderness, in "most of the wisdom of civilized man he is only a child." Wise in the lore of the wood and the plain, his limited knowledge of "things relating to social or political life" (60) makes it difficult for him to cope with the demands of civilization. Red Cloud's return to the wilderness at the end of the novel, viewed in this light, represents not only the moral superiority of wildness but also the political and military superiority of a way of life based upon its destruction.

Butler clearly laments the replacement of traditional native culture with the social and economic worldview of Victorian capitalism. His novel is not so much a paean of praise to the pristine wilderness and to the redmen who make it their home as it is an elegy lamenting the death of wild Nature and the noble savage. Red Cloud tells the narrator that all of humankind once enjoyed the "free life of the open air," but when white men grew to be civilized they lost their ability to live in the wilds of forest and plain. Now the red men, too, are becoming helpless as they lose knowledge of their traditional crafts. No longer able to hunt buffalo with "the weapons they had themselves made" (163), they are dependent upon

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of agricultural settlements. Welsh remembers with pleasure the "hardship" of a spartan, self-sufficient life on the trail.

the guns and rifles of their conquerors for their survival. The old freedom and independence of the wild plains is vanishing, and Butler mourns its loss.

Butler's description of an old buffalo bull, like his description of the noble savage, illustrates a romantic view of wildness that, read in the context of the entire novel, is a lament for a paradise soon to be lost. Unlike most late Victorians, who "heard only anguished animal cries" in the "vernal woods where Wordsworth had heard only Harmony" (Altick 229), Butler idealized wild Nature. His buffalo bull, mighty "monarch of the prairie" (171), approaches the narrator and his party with the fearlessness of a king in undisputed possession of his territory:

> The look now was calm and tranquil; the great beast was at home in this solitary waste, as his race through countless generations had been at home here; for in these wilds, so green in summer, so white in winter, he and his had roamed since time began. (169-70)

Butler's buffalo are noble, majestic beasts, proud and unafraid, indigenous inhabitants of a "solitary waste" that may prove hostile to outsiders but in which they, like Red Cloud, are at home. As wilderness is threatened by the demands of advancing civilization, however, the buffalo's dominion is challenged by the crops and livestock of European settlers. Like Red Cloud, it has no place in this new social order. Unable to adapt, it must face extinction.

Butler's response to both Red Cloud and the buffalo illustrates a paradox that pervades the western Canadian wilderness romance. His simultaneous desire for wildness and civilization creates a tension that he cannot resolve. That the demands of these opposing states is usually incompatible is the cause, Wallace Stegner says, of the ambivalence inherent in the frontier settler's relationship to the wilderness:

> The vein of melancholy in the North American mind may be owing to many causes, but it is surely not weakened by the perception that the fulfillment of the American Dream means inevitably the death of the noble savagery and freedom of the wild. Anyone who has lived on a frontier knows the inescapable ambivalence of the old-fashioned American conscience, for he has first renewed himself in Eden and then set about converting it into the lamentable modern world. (282)

Butler faces this ambivalent situation at the end of the novel, when the conclusion of the narrator's quest comes into conflict with the wilderness life of both Red Cloud and the buffalo. Having renewed himself in the Edenic wilderness, he is about to return to a civilization bent upon destroying wildness in the name of economic progress. Butler's attitude suggests that this economic development is inevitable. Although he clearly approves of his Indian protagonist's love for the wilderness, his acknowledgement that the buffalo and the savage must give way before the superior power of Victorian capital helped to naturalize their defeat. "The great prairies are dying; the buffalo are going," Red Cloud says with philosophical resignation near the end of the novel. "The red man must pass away too" (317). Before he leaves the narrator to resume his travel into the wilderness, however, Red Cloud symbolically participates in its destruction when he leads his white friend to a hidden deposit of gold.

Butler's treatment of the conclusion to the narrator's quest, like the narrator's response to the gold, is ambiguous. Faced with the prospect of losing Red Cloud's companionship, the narrator recognizes that the rewards of his wilderness adventure--"the lessons of bravery, hardihood, endurance, activity, and energy" (311)--by themselves are of little value. Since

money is a prerequisite for status and power in a profit-oriented economy, he knows that he needs the wealth that Red Cloud offers him. Possession of the valley of gold, however, means an end to his wild life. He envisions an industrial future filled with the smoke of cities, "its crowds chained to the great machine called civilization," and mourns the loss of the "great wilderness," of the "vast and gorgeous sunsets" and of his companionship with "this strange lonely man" (316). Although his new wealth does not reconcile him to "accept with contentment the prospect of abandoning this wild roving life" (318), it does not occur to the narrator that he can follow the path that Red Cloud has chosen. Civilization, with its superior power, has "chained" him to a future of industrial "progress" that precludes life in the wilderness.

Red Cloud's decision to lead the narrator to the hidden valley of gold involves him in contradictory responses to the wilderness/civilization dichotomy. On the one hand, he loves the wilderness and wants to preserve its wildness. He is critical of the white men who "think there is but one work in life, to get money" (39) and who therefore view the wilderness as a source of economic wealth. Yet Red Cloud leads the white narrator to the gold. Although it is of no value to him, he recognizes that a white man without money is "like an Indian who has no buffalo" (315). The strength, endurance and skills that the narrator has acquired on his wilderness quest will not help him make his way in an industrial economy in which money is power. Why, then, does Butler not let the narrator remain in the wilderness, where he has no need of gold? Why does the novel end with the narrator's decision to return to civilization and Red Cloud's decision to return to the wilderness alone? Red Cloud, surely, speaks with the voice of the author when he tells the narrator that every man must follow the path of his own race: "The red man cannot give up the wilderness; he dies amid the city and

the fenced field. You cannot make this wild life your own, even though you may wish to do so. You have other work to do; you must go back and do it" (317). Although Butler does not spell out what this work entails, it clearly involves a return to civilization and to the industrial capitalism of Victorian society. The author's tone is elegaic when he writes of the loss of everything that the wilderness stands for--the buffalo, the noble savage, the freedom of life on the open plains-- yet he does not challenge the social and economic values that make its wholesale destruction necessary[6]. Instead he accepts, symbolically, the power of gold to tranform wildness into a means of production.

Butler is certainly aware of the impact of economic development on the wilderness. In The Great Lone Land, an account of his travels between the Red River and the Rockies in 1870, he recognizes that Indian resistance to the railroad which invades buffalo breeding grounds is futile before the power of American and British capital. Although the Indian brave is strong, ". . . the dollar is mightier still" (68) and it has determined that he and his brothers must leave the land of their ancestors. Butler laments the destruction of their way of life, yet he is unable to imagine an alternative scenario. His acceptance of industrial progress thus creates enormous irony in his writing. He so obviously loves the wild land of the great plains and so clearly admires the freedom and independence of the native people, yet his books contain a tacit endorsement of economic progress.

This "progress" is the primary cause of the destruction of wildness: the replacement

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[6]As Daniel Francis points out, the notion of the "Vanishing Indian" was an expedient one for a society imbued with the spirit of economic progress. Although a number of late-nineteenth-century writers mourned the disappearance of native culture, there was no suggestion that the civilization which was destroying it should be halted. Indians occupied land of value to farmers and other settlers. "It was convenient that they should simply disappear" (59).

of a subsistence native economy with the profit-oriented economy of incoming white settlers destroyed the balance between humans and Nature that existed prior to the mid-1800s. Buffalo and other fur-bearing animals were not depleted as long as they were killed to meet the subsistence needs of the local population (Spry 25). The fur trade, however, introduced glass beads, cotton fabric and other imported merchandise which provided incentives for hunters and trappers to slaughter more animals than they could use. The market economy that it generated motivated increased demands on local ecosystems and resulted, as William Cronon notes in his study of the impact of European settlement on New England, in "a disintegration of . . . earlier ecological practices" (99). Although Butler's Indian protagonist remains faithful to the traditional ways of his ancestors, his assistance to the narrator helps transform a subsistence economy to an exploitive modern version. The author does not applaud the transformation, but he accepts it as a necessary part of progress. By concluding his white protagonist's wilderness quest with his acquisition of a gold mine, Butler implicitly supports the replacement of a sustainable traditional economy with the growth-oriented economy of Western capitalism.

A story that Butler recounts in The Great Lone Land illustrates the compatibility of the Indian's subsistence economy with Nature in its wild state. A missionary, meeting with a band of Piegans on the banks of the Bow river, advises that they make peace with the American "Longknives" who have slaughtered members of their tribe. The chief, in his response, points out that the white man's way is incompatible not only with the Indian way of life but also with the life of wild Nature:

> "See the buffalo, how they dwell with us; they care not for the closeness of our lodges, the smoke of our camp-fires does not frighten them, the shouts of

> our young men will not drive them away; but behold how they flee from the sight, the sound, and the smell of the white man!" (271-2)

The white man sees the buffalo as a source of profit rather than of food and other necessities. The buffalo, therefore, must flee from him since his need is limitless. It need not fear the Indian, however, because his need is easily satisfied and he will not attack the buffalo unless he is hungry. Although the written accounts of explorers, journalists and fur traders vary in their view of the Indian's attitude to conservation of the buffalo and other natural resources, modern historians agree that the relationship of the plains and parkland Indian to his environment was sustainable[7]. Whether the cause was indolence, prudence or spiritual constraint, native people did not kill more animals or cut down more trees than they needed for their own use. Not until the prairies were opened to commercial exploitation was the "old balance between a limited human use of the gifts of nature . . . and the natural regeneration of those gifts" (Spry 30) finally destroyed.

Butler's view of the inevitability and the desirability of western settlement, expressed clearly in The Great Lone Land, helps to explain the ambivalent attitude to wildness expressed in Red Cloud. Near the end of his travel narrative he says that the area around the "forks" of the Saskatchewan River is destined to be "an important centre of commerce and civilization" (330). Its fertility, its beauty and its mineral wealth, coupled with the lack of available land farther East, ensures that it will become the site of "a busy scene of commerce" in which "man's labour would waken echoes now answering only to the wild things of plain and forest" (331). Although it is difficult to tell from the passage whether

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[7]For a summary of the impact of native hunting on the environment see the accounts by Roe (631-659), Spry and Nelson.

Butler's vision is of a prosperous utopia or an industrial nightmare, there is nothing in the tone of his writing to suggest that he views this future with horror. Indeed, in the report which forms an apppendix to The Great Lone Land he makes recommendations designed to "secure peace and order to the Saskatchewan, encourage settlement, and open up to the influences of civilized man one of the fairest regions of the earth" (381). After serving as an intelligence officer for Colonel Wolseley's 1870 expedition to suppress Métis insurrection, Butler travelled West to investigate conditions in the isolated settlements between the Rockies and Red River and to make recommendations regarding the establishment of law and order. His report to Adams G. Archibald, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, makes three recommendations: appointment of a civil magistrate to hold courts throughout the region, organization of a police force and the establishment of white settlements in the neighbourhoods of Edmonton and Carlton. Although the report is motivated, at least in part, by a desire to protect the Indians and Métis from the ill effects of contact with unscrupulous white settlers, a major influence was Butler's own belief that the country must be made safe for colonization. He concludes his report by explaining that this point of view governed his recommendations:

> From that point which sees a vast country lying, as it were, silently awaiting the approach of the immense wave of human life which rolls unceasingly from Europe to America. Far off as lie the regions of the Saskatchewan . . . still that wave of human life is destined to reach those beautiful solitudes, and to convert the wild luxuriance of their now useless vegetation into all the requirements of civilized existence. And if it be matter for desire that . . . a powerful nation should arise with the strength and the manhood which race

> and climate and tradition would assign to it . . . then surely it is worthy of all toil of hand and brain, on the part of those who to-day rule, that this great link in the chain of such a future nationality should no longer remain undeveloped, a prey to the conflicts of savage races, at once the garden and the wilderness of the Central Continent[8]. (385-6)

In this passage Butler constructs an argument that is intended to justify the settlement of the

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[8]Fifty-seven years after the publication of The Great Lone Land British writers were still arguing that the failure of aboriginal people to "use" their land constituted valid grounds for European occupation. In his study The Central European Immigrant in Canada (1929), Robert England acknowleges that nomadic Indian people preserved the ecological integrity of the land while white settlers exploited it with no thought for the future. He insists, however, that the right to own property can be based only upon commercial use of its resources:

> For centuries the Indian and his culture held Canada--a land locked in inactivity. On breaking camp he was careful to bury the embers of his fire and the remnants of food, unpile any stones he may have had occasion to pile together, fill up all holes and leave a landscape untouched by his passage; he vanished, leaving no trace, as a fish moves through water or a bird through air. . . . But the white man had other ways. He left his mark wherever he went. No landscape was the same when once he had touched it. . . . The wealth of stream, forest, and soil was spent prodigally, the mountains tunnelled, the roaring waterfalls harnessed and milions of bushels of golden grain reaped from the rich soil of the country, without thought for the morrow and scarcely a care for the present. Each took his share or more of the wealth that came and the Indian relinquished his domain for our Dominion. "La propriété," said Proudhon, "c'est le vol." But it cannot be said that it was so in this case. Gradually there is being formulated a new and truer doctrine of the rights of property. Even such a supporter of forms of Socialism as H. G. Wells can now describe property as the protection of things against promiscuous and mainly wasteful use. Use is the only equitable title to property which ought to confer responsibility as well as privilege. . . . . We dispossessed the Indian and there are sound reasons arising from his neglect to build, why this should have been so. Since then, our vacant lands have been open to Europe provided those who entered were assimilable and could contribute to the development of the country. (189-90)

Butler's justification of his recommendation that white settlements be established in the West is only marginally less arrogant than England's amazing defence of Canada's immigration policy.

West. He first establishes that the wilderness is not being adequately used. The vast country "silently awaiting" European settlers to people its beautiful "solitudes" appears, from his description, to be uninhabited, and the "now useless vegetation" to serve no useful purpose. He then points out that settlement of the area is inevitable. The wave of immigration which "rolls unceasingly" from Europe is "destined" to convert the prairie wilderness to civilization. Finally, he concludes that the present rulers of the country (the British) should exert every effort to develop this "great link in the chain" of a powerful future nation which is being created on the North American continent. Although Butler recognizes that this development will destroy the traditional way of life of native people, he assumes that the benefit--the greater glory of the British Empire--will outweigh the cost. What he does not acknowledge, however, is the inconsistency of his vision of the West as both garden and wilderness. To cultivate a garden in the wilderness is to destroy its wildness.

By concluding their wilderness quests with a return, both literal and symbolic, to civilization and to the economic values of industrial progress, Ballantyne and Butler display an ambivalent response to the wildness of the Canadian prairies. Although they strongly validate both the landscape and wilderness life, they fail to recognize the implications of the wisdom that their heroes acquire on their quests. The Young Fur Traders depicts the woods of the North West as the home of exciting adventures that turn irresponsible boys into strong, self-reliant men. Red Cloud describes the magnitude of vision and the spiritual integrity that results from a free, unconstrained life on the open plains. The gifts of both these quests, however, are put to the service of exploiting--via the fur trade and a gold mine--the wilderness that produced them. Caught in the two major ideological currents of the time--romanticism and economic nationalism (Francis, R. Douglas 38)--Ballantyne and Butler

create simultaneous, but incompatible, images of the West as a pristine wilderness and as the future home of flourishing agricultural and industrial settlements.

Chapter Three

Transforming the Heathen Wilderness: The Impact of Christianity in Oowikapun and The Prairie Chief

> Despite their differences, the missionaries agreed on one thing--they were agents of a superior civilization, and in order to survive contact with it the Indians were going to have to give up their pagan superstitions and embrace the White Way. . . . The White Way was superior because it challenged and conquered nature. . . . Because they did nothing with the resources of the land--built no cities, tilled no fields, dug no mines--Indians deserved to be superceded by a civilization that recognized the potential for material progress.
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> - Daniel Francis, The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture, 1992[1]

The endorsement of a mercantile economy based upon the exploitation of natural resources is only one of the ways in which early writers of western Canadian wilderness romances validated the destruction of wildness. Equally important was the role that they assigned to Christianity. R. M. Ballantyne's The Prairie Chief: A Tale, published in 1886, and Egerton Ryerson Young's Oowikapun or How the Gospel Reached the Nelson River Indians, published in 1896, privilege civilization above wildness by associating Christianity with settled communities and with the social values of Victorian civilization and by

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[1]p. 52.

associating traditional native spirituality with wildness and Nature. Since Christianity was an unquestioned good in the Victorian hegemony, and native spirituality a threat to Christian values, civilization and all that was associated with it basked in the reflected virtue of Anglo-Protestant ideology while wilderness and Nature were tarnished by their association with pagan superstition and evil. In both novels the successful achievement of the heroes' quests involves bringing the light of Christianity to the darkness of the heathen wilderness.

Throughout this chapter I examine the way in which prairie writers of western **European** origin portrayed the plains aboriginal culture. My concern is not so much with the historical accuracy of their descriptions as with the impact of their views both on aboriginal people and on the prairie landscape. Because I am a descendant of Belgian and Dutch immigrants rather than a native Canadian, my point of view is that of a **white** environmentalist. I cite recent work by aboriginal writers in order to highlight the Eurocentrism of early prairie fiction and to illustrate, if only briefly, alternative perceptions of the European settlement story (perceptions widely shared by white revisionist historians today). My intent is not to privilege aboriginal perspectives, but to show how early **European** views of native people influenced the way in which settlers responded to the prairie wilderness.

In The Prairie Chief and Oowikapun the heroes' quests are for social redemption via the conversion of a wilderness culture into the civilization of Western Christianity. The heroes' goals are not so much personal wisdom, power or salvation as they are the spiritual and social transformation of the Indian people. Whitewing, in The Prairie Chief, not only "accept[s] fully the Gospel for himself," but also is eager to teach it to others "as the only real and perfect guide in life and comfort in death" (63). He becomes a missionary and roams the

mountains and plains of the West, carrying the Gospel to his own people and to their hereditary foes, the Blackfoot Indians. Overcoming the obstacles to their conversion constitutes the adventures which form the plot of the novel. The Prairie Chief concludes with the symbolic achievement of Whitewing's quest: Rushing River, a fierce Blackfoot warrior, becomes a Christian and marries the daughter of Whitewing's friend Little Tim. The good work which the white preacher had begun, the narrator tells us, is carried on "not only by Whitewing, but, as far as example went--and that was a long way--by Little and Big Tim and their respective wives, and Bounding Bull, as well as by many of their kindred" (250). Oowikapun contains a similar quest to bring the Gospel to the Nelson River Indians of northern Manitoba. Although much of the novel concerns Oowikapun's personal search for spiritual truth, the latter episodes centre on his long and dangerous journey to the mission station at Norway House in order to obtain the services of a missionary for his people. That his quest is successful is evident in the people's response when Oowikapun returns home with a preacher. After only a few services the Nelson River Indians joyfully accept the teachings of Christianity: "The ever-blessed Spirit carried home to the hearts of these simple people the truths uttered, and deep and genuine were the results" (222). Forty men and women are baptised at the end of the second service, and "many more decided fully for Christ" (223) during the following days. Like Whitewing's quest in The Prairie Chief, Oowikapun's quest concludes with the triumphant victory of Christianity.

Because these novels are based primarily on a **social** interpretation of Victorian religious teachings, it is difficult to identify the theological basis for the worldview that emerges. We can, however, piece together from the texts a picture of an anthropocentric religion that emphasizes virtue and kindliness in personal interactions, but ignores

completely human treatment of the natural world. The old missionary in The Prairie Chief says that his mission on earth is "to teach those principles which, if universally acted on, would put an end to both [war and bloodshed]" by pointing men "to that Saviour who is an embodiment of the principles of Love and Peace and Goodwill" (98-9). Ballantyne, of course, does not state that this ideal of benevolence and justice applies only to the relationship of humans to each other, but his complete disregard of an animistic Indian religion and his association of Christianity exclusively with the social values of Victorian civilization strongly suggests a failure to value wild Nature.

Young (who spent eight years as a Methodist missionary in northern Manitoba) takes this disregard of Nature one step further by implying that a powerful connection to the natural world is incompatible with genuine spirituality. Animism challenged the Victorian belief in "man's special place above and beyond nature" (Berger 45) and therefore posed an ideological threat to the concept of human dominion over the earth. Young responded by denigrating the value of a non-anthropocentric religion. Oowikapun's life in the wilderness has made him aware of the beauty and majesty of God's creation, but has failed to instill in him a sense of man's proper place in the grand scheme of things:

> While, in his simple faith, he had paddled along the beautiful rivers, or wandered through the wild forests of his country, catching the fish or hunting the game, where at times he had heard the thunder's crash and seen the majestic tree riven by the lightning's power, and perhaps in these seasons of nature's wild commotion had "seen God in cloud and heard him in the wind," yet until very lately he had never heard of anything which had caused him to imagine that he was in any way allied to that Great Spirit, or was in any way

responsible to him. (6)

According to Christian theology humankind, made in God's image, has the ability to transcend the natural world. Oowikapun's "simple faith," however, does not enable him to recognize either the spiritual privilege of his association with the divine or the responsibility entailed by his elevated place in the cosmic hierarchy. Part of a spiritual tradition based upon what Thomas Berry calls "nature mysticism" (184), Oowikapun does not attribute to humanity a unique relationship with the Great Spirit[2]. Frederick Turner, in his magnificent study of Western attitudes to the wilderness, suggests that primitive peoples' feelings of kinship for non-human Nature and their animistic belief that even rocks and water possess a soul account for their failure to assert human superiority over the rest of creation (11). This belief system could well account for Oowikapun's inability to perceive any special alliance with his god. The author's point of view, on the other hand, is based upon what Turner describes as a historically-based Christian dualism between body and soul, world and heaven, man and nature (68). Only Christianity, Young's narrator implies, can instill in humanity a proper sense of its connection to a spiritual power stronger and morally superior to the earth-bound world of Nature.

Christianity's privileging of man above Nature finds its logical expression in the unequivocal validation of Western civilization. I have already pointed out the way in which

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[2]Paula Gunn Allen says that traditional American Indian people do not see themselves as separate from Nature, but as part of a "dynamic" creation in which "all animals, vegetables, and minerals" have "the same or even greater privileges than humans" (57). This point is echoed in the recent writing of Canadian aboriginal people--see, for example, George Erasmus's and Joe Sanders's "Canadian History: An Aboriginal Perspective," Stan McKay's "Calling Creation Into Our Family," Gary Potts's "The Land Is the Boss: How Stewardship Can Bring Us Together" and Joanne Barnaby's "Culture and Sovereignty."

Ballantyne used the association of Christianity with settled communities in The Young Fur Traders to emphasize the superiority of civilization to wildness[3]. Young uses a similar tactic in Oowikapun to extol the blessings that follow in the wake of God's word. Oowikapun, newly arrived at the Norway House mission station in quest of a missionary for his people, is amazed by the benefits that Christianity has conferred upon the Indians of that area. Not only have they received the gifts of spiritual enlightenment, but also the physical and emotional comforts of Victorian-style civilization:

> So marvelously had Christianity lifted up and benefited the people that Oowikapun with his simple forest ways, at times felt keenly his ignorance as he contrasted his crude life with what he now witnessed.
>
> A genuine civilization following Christianity had come to many of these once degraded tribes, and now comfortable homes and large and happy family circles are to be found where not a generation ago all was dark and degraded, and the sweet word "home" was utterly unknown. (201)

Young, of course, had no way of knowing that almost a century later these words would be read with bitter irony. Civilization meant that smallpox, alcoholism, near-starvation and the humiliating confinement of Reserve life replaced the proud, self-sufficient life of freedom which Butler describes so poignantly in Red Cloud. It also meant the replacement of a sustainable, earth-based spirituality that stressed the interdependence of all living things with an exploitative Western Christian tradition "radically oriented away from the natural world"

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[3]Christianity's civilizing influence, as Ralph Connor's The Sky Pilot (1899) illustrates, is not limited to the heathen wilderness. The notice of the first church service in the foothills ranching community of Swan Creek is "the advance wave of the great ocean of civilization" and a harbinger of economic "progress" (38).

(Berry, Thomas 80). Young, firmly convinced of the social and moral superiority of Christianity to paganism, can see only that the Indians have been "lifted up and benefited" by their contact with white missionaries. He sees "comfortable homes" and "happy family circles" rather than the despair that, fifteen years earlier, had motivated the Frog Lake Massacre and other acts of resistance to Western civilization.

Since ecocriticism (like new historicism) rejects the concept of history as a "stable point of reference" (Greenblatt, Introduction 5) to which literary interpretation can securely refer, the critic cannot determine the historical accuracy of fictional works by comparing them to accounts by historians. We have no way of knowing for certain what native life was like prior to the introduction of Christian civilization. Eyewitness accounts by early travellers, fur traders and missionaries were as much colored by their worldviews as are the histories constructed from these documents. Since every age, as Frederick Jackson Turner notes, "writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time" (qtd. in Regehr 87), historical accounts tell us as much about the ideology of their authors as they do about the social conditions of the past. Young was clearly biased in his observations of the impact of Christianity on the Indians of the West, but was he any more biased than revisionist historians who depict an idealized native culture attuned to the spiritual needs of the people and to the integrity of their environment?[4] We cannot answer that question in an absolute way. In the absence of any objective criteria for truth we can only acknowledge the ideological perimeters of our own work and use them as the

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[4]W. L. Morton, for example, portrays the culture of plains and parkland Indians in near-utopian terms: "Few men have ever known an ampler adaptation to what nature had prepared; few men have known, in a life of endless challenge, a greater security, a more conscious independence" (165).

motivating force for exploring the ways in which other writers privileged their particular versions of social reality. We cannot **know** that Indians were happier prior to the advent of Christianity, but we can show how novelists like Ballantyne and Young make an ideological connection between its worldview and the destruction of wildness. Privileging the benefits of Christian civilization above the "dark and degraded" (Young 201) life of a hunting people whose culture was formed by intimate contact with a wilderness environment helped to justify the destruction of that wildness in order to achieve the greater blessings of civilization.

Ballantyne further privileged civilization above wildness by associating "good" Christian Indians with the personal and domestic qualities valued by Victorian culture. Indeed, in The Prairie Chief he emphasizes that the good Indians are a lot like white people. Although Whitewing, for example, possesses the best qualities of his own people, it is his similarity to the white man that makes him "a very great man in the estimation of his tribe":

> . . . besides being possessed of qualities which are highly esteemed among all savages--such as courage, strength, agility, and the like--he was a deep thinker, and held speculative views in regard to the great Manitou (God), as well as the ordinary affairs of life, which perplexed even the oldest men of his tribe, and induced the younger men to look on him as a profound mystery.
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> Indeed the feelings of the latter towards Whitewing amounted almost to veneration, for while, on the one hand, he was noted as one of the most fearless among the braves, and a daring assailant of that king of the northern wilderness the grizzly bear, he was on the other hand modest and retiring--never boasted of his prowess, disbelieved in the principle of revenge, which to

> most savages is not only a pleasure but a duty, and refused to decorate his sleeves or leggings with the scalplocks of his enemies. Indeed he had been known to allow more than one enemy to escape from his hand in time of war when he might easily have killed him. (1-2)

It is not so much his prowess on the field of battle and in the hunt that makes the men of his tribe regard Whitewing with awe and admiration. Instead, his superior intellectual and spiritual qualities, his modesty and his adherence to a European code of warfare make him the object of veneration and a source of mystery to the other Indians who, we assume, lack these particular characteristics. That Whitewing becomes a Christian is inevitable since it is an important part of the "package" of qualities that Ballantyne associates with Victorian virtue. In a similar way, Ballantyne associates desirable "white" qualities with the other Christian Indians. Moonlight, "though only an Indian," is "unusually graceful and pretty" (151) and is far more intelligent than the young Blackfoot women "who wag their tongues without ceasing when they have nothing to say" (208). Skipping Rabbit, a "precocious" girl who laughs a lot and is fond of fun, has picked up "the ways and manners of the pale-faces" (194) from her friend Little Tim. Umqua, who is "rudely intellectual," is "an exception to the ordinary class of squaw" (206). Rushing River is a "peculiar savage" (206) who believes that women are not made to be the slaves of men. Eaglenose is so talkative and playful that Skipping Rabbit is almost ready to believe that his father was "a paleface" (196). Now, there is no obvious connection between treating women well or being fond of fun and the values of civilization. What is important, however, is the way in which the author patronizingly grants approval to Indians on the basis of their similarity to idealized white people. Good Indians, he implies, are like the British. The British, as everyone knows, are

civilized; is it so very fanciful to assume that we are intended to complete the syllogism by concluding that good Indians are therefore civilized and that they accept the worldview of Victorian culture?

Ballantyne privileges civilization more directly by showing its power over wildness. One incident, particularly, symbolizes this power. A group of Blackfeet Indians led by Rushing River, who has not yet reformed and become a Christian, attacks the stronghold of Little Tim, a white woodsman who has married an Indian woman. This stronghold is a marvel of ingenuity designed to withstand the most savage assault. It contains an inpenetrable cavern whose access is controlled by an "ingenious device" (94) which allows even the weakest woman to lift the stone trapdoor, but which makes the door nearly immovable from outside once it is fastened in place. Softswan, Little Tim's daughter-in-law, proudly tells the missionary who has taken refuge in the cavern with her that her husband's father has invented the device: "Big Tim says hims fadder be great at 'ventions. He 'vent many t'ings" (94-5). Not the least of his inventions is an elaborate system of fireworks connected to a fuse which, when lit, ignites all the fireworks simultaneously. When Big Tim returns to the cavern he lights the fuse. The result is the triumph of the civilized mind over savagery. The Blackfeet, who have been drinking Little Tim's rum, respond with horified amazement to the eruption of squibs and Roman candles and firecrackers and rush in a drunken frenzy to the cabin door. Their departure is hastened by Big Tim's victory cheer, which terrifies them still further:

> . . . [Big Tim] beheld his foes tumbling, rushing, crashing, bounding down the track like maniacs--which indeed they were for the time being--and he succeeded in urging them to even greater exertions by giving utterance to a

> grand resonant British cheer, which had been taught him by his father, and had indeed been used by him more than once, with signal success, against his Indian foes. (109)

Big Tim's "British" cheer heralds the victory of civilization over wildness. Prior to using fireworks to defend his cabin his father had used his knowledge of explosives to concoct "some things that wellnigh drove the red men out o' their senses" and made the Indians regard him as "a great medicine-man" (100). His successful use of fireworks to dispell the Blackfeet represents the triumph of European knowledge over the ignorance of savages. This power--the power of "the book"--enables the British to dominate both wild Indians and wild Nature[5]. No wonder Big Tim "had such a decided preference for the tongue of his white father, that he had taught it to his bride, and refused to converse with her in any other" (68). No wonder Skipping Rabbit, Eaglenose, Brighteyes, Softswan, Moonlight and Bounding Bull take advantage of the fur trader's offer to teach them "to learn English, and read the Bible of the pale-faces for themselves" (252-3). The language and learning of Christian civilization confer power on those who adhere to its way.

Although both Young and Ballantyne use the association of Christianity with secular power to privilege the civilization of Victorian culture, Young's novel emphasizes the connection between civilization and the moral virtues of Christian benevolence and domesticity. Ballantyne's missionary believes that Christianity embodies the principles of

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[5]It is surely more than coincidence that, immediately after his victory over the Blackfeet, Little Tim captures a grizzly bear for sale to a zoo. This episode has nothing to do with the quest for redemption which forms the plot of the novel, but it does help to illustrate the way in which that redemption is achieved. Since Western Christianity is incompatible with wildness, wild Nature (symbolized by the grizzly) must be subdued and imprisoned before Christianity can gain control of the minds and hearts of Whitewing's people.

love, peace and goodwill (99). Young shows how Christian Indians practice these principles in their family circles. Memotas, a Christian Indian, cares tenderly for Owwikapun when he is injured by a wolf. He also manifests unusual kindness to his wife and children, treating them with far more respect, the narrator tells us, than Indian men normally accord their families. His wife, on her part, plays the role of a good Victorian housewife by keeping the wigwam and the children clean and tidy. Christianity, it appears, brings domestic harmony and bliss to the heathen wilderness: "Oowikapun was bewildered at the marvelous contrast between what he had been accustomed to witness in the wretched wigwams and lives of his own people and what he saw in this bright little tent of Memotas. It was all so new and strange to him. Everybody seemed so happy" (21). Later, after the missionary has brought the Gospel to the Nelson River Indians, Oowikapun's wife Astumastao recognizes that Christianity requires her to learn the skills of housewifery. When she and her husband visit the mission station at Norway House she is anxious to learn "all she could about housekeeping and other things which would more fully fit her for helping her less fortunate Indian sisters at the distant Indian village, who, now that they had become Christians, were also trying to attain to some of the customs and comforts of civilization" (234-5). Christianity, in Young's view, is not only an ethical and spiritual belief system, but also a way of life that involves adopting the values of Victorian civilization.

The reponse of the Norway House area Indians to the missionary's work further establishes the triumphant superiority of the white man's way to the bad old ways of the Indians and foreshadows both the Christianization and the civilization of the North West:

> They had in a measure become convinced that their religious teachers . . . were imposters and liars, and so, while submitting somewhat to their sway,

> were yet chafing under it. When the first missionaries arrived among them they were soon convinced that they were their true friends. Not only were they men of saintly lives and pure characters, but they were men who practically sympathized with the people, and to the full measure of their ability, and often beyond, they helped the sick and suffering ones, and more than once divided their last meal with the poor, hungry creatures who came to them in their hours of direst need. The result was that the people were so convinced of the genuineness of these messengers of peace and good will, that large numbers of them gladly accepted the truth and became loving Christians. (183-4)

This passage privileges Christianity above native spirituality not on the basis of its theological superiority but on the grounds that Christians are better people than heathens. The narrator equates goodness and virtue with the practice of Christ's teachings, and suggests that the generosity and kindness they engender are absent from the lives of those who follow the old ways[6]. Although Young's narrator does acknowledge the bad behavior of those white

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[6]Although the stories of Methodist missionary John Maclean are far more sympathetic to the religious beliefs of First Nations people, Maclean, too, privileges Christianity above native spirituality by suggesting that it represents a higher stage in the spiritual evolution of a people. "The Spirit Guide," in The Warden of the Plains and Other Stories of Life in the Canadian North-West (1896), recognizes as positive the connection between native spiritual beliefs and Nature, yet concludes that native people must adopt the values of European civilization. Running Wolf tells his followers that their glorious past is dead and that they must conform to a new way of life:

> He depicted the future in dark colors, the gradual decay of the red man, the diseases and debauchery of the people, the corruption of the Indian politicians and the utter overthrow of the native religion. He counselled them to accept of the glory of the coming day when the red men would mingle with the white race, accepting their teachings and civilizations and finding therein peace, plenty and contentment. (246)

In a similar story, "The Coming of Apauakas," the narrator recognizes that civilization has

men who "bring their fire water and their sins from Christian lands" (90), his novel clearly establishes the moral superiority of Christianity to the native religion. Indian spiritual leaders are "imposters and liars," whereas the missionaries are "men of saintly lives and pure characters" who provide practical assistance to the Indians. Now doubtlessly there are wicked Indians and depraved medicine men, just as there are bad Christians who fail to follow the teachings of their faith. What is at issue here, however, is Young's wholesale condemnation of an entire spiritual tradition. He does not say that there are bad Indians who do not practise their beliefs, but that their beliefs themselves constitute what Astumastao calls "the bad old way" (61).

Young's identification of Indian spiritual leaders as villains and Christian spiritual leaders as heroes illustrates his use of a moral dichotomy to privilege the values of Christianity. He creates a black and white world in which heathens are bad and Christians are good. The writing of his contemporaries, however, suggests that Young's view is not so much false as it is one-sided. Butler, for example, notes that Indians are indeed warlike, but points out that their savage behavior is not noticeably different from the behavior of Christians. He recounts a story in which a missionary rebukes an assemblage of Crees for their unceasing warfare. The Cree chief, in turn, points out that the record of the white Christian is no better than that of his red brother who worships the Manitou:

> ". . . what is the news we hear from the traders and the blackrobes? Is it not always the news of war? The Kitchi-Mokamans (i.e. the Americans) are on

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meant disease, the loss of land and the destruction of buffalo herds to native people, but suggests that the blessings of Christ more than compensate for these losses. "Health, peace and comfort" return to a plague-stricken people when a young Indian man brings them the story of Jesus, and they learn to live "a nobler life" (301).

> the war-path against their brethren of the South, the English are fighting some tribes far away over the big lake; the French, and all the other tribes are fighting too! My brother, it is news of war, always news of war! and we--we go on the war-path in small numbers. We stop when we kill a few of our enemies and take a few scalps; but your nations go to war in countless thousands, and we hear of more of your braves killed in one battle than all our tribe numbers together." (Great Lone Land 232)

I use this story not to prove the moral superiority of First Nations people to white people, but to show that Young's comparision of Christian and native spirituality is not based upon either an "objective" or a complete picture of social reality. Rather, it presents a version of reality that is heavily coloured by the judicious selection of "data" designed to support the worldview of Western Christianity. Butler's romantic picture of the noble red man is not necessarily more accurate than Young's picture of the misguided savage who follows the "bad old way" of heathen superstition. It does, however, serve a different ideological purpose.

Ideology is most effective, as Norman Fairclough points out in his study of language and power, when the reader is not aware of its presence. When the reader perceives that particular discourse sustains power inequalities "at one's own expense," its ideology can be challenged and it loses some of its power to control his or her interpretation of the text. The astute author, therefore, hides his or her worldview behind "background assumptions which on the one hand lead the text producer to 'textualize' the world in a particular way, and on the other hand lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a particular way" (85). The story in Young's novel is a Christian quest for redemption. It does not overtly suggest that Western

settlers should destroy the wilderness in order to make way for civilization, yet the background assumptions that privilege Christianity above native spirituality encourage the reader to accept that destruction as the necessary price of moral progress. Young's rejection of a traditional native religion is a rejection of the wildness with which it is associated and an implicit endorsement of the antithetical values of civilization.

How can we explain the contradiction between the Christian belief that all people are equal in the eyes of God and the Western assumption of cultural superiority? Friesen suggests that changing conceptions of race and class destroyed the Enlightenment's ideal of the noble savage and replaced it with the belief that "humankind had developed progressively through a sequence of cultural stages from 'savagery' and 'barbarism' to the highest rank--Victorian England" (Canadian Prairies 94). This cultural hierarchy imitated the "natural" hierarchy that Victorians found in Nature. Their belief that man formed the pinnacle of a social pyramid in which animal life was ranked in descending order from the highest to the lowest reinforced their conviction that "the principles of the government in nature applied in human relations as well" (Berger 49). The white man was superior to the savage just as **homo sapiens** was superior to the ape and the ape superior to the ant. Missionaries, important representatives of their culture, played a major role in perpetuating this Eurocentric hierarchy. Since native people, with their modest needs and their primitive tools, could not compete with Europeans armed with sophisticated technology and the driving power of economic ambition, they were fated to fall by the wayside--unless they could be elevated to the rank of Christian **and induced to adopt the social and economic values of Western Christianity**. In order to justify the imposition of these values on the prairie Indians, writers and missionaries and other such people first had to destroy the credibility of

the native tradition. Ballantyne, therefore, had to denounce Indians for such things as the "cruel practice of deserting the aged" (27) when their camp was attacked by enemies, even though such a practice may have contributed to their survival. Young had to describe Oowikapun's pagan life as characterized by darkness and superstition (23). Since traditional religion, as Todorov notes in his study of the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and Mexico, is important as "a guarantee of a cultural identity" (83), the validity of native spirituality had to be destroyed in order to obliterate the threat that a strong, united Indian nation posed to Western supremacy on the prairies.

Perhaps the most threatening aspect of First Nations culture to an immigrant people bent on settlement was its strong sense of connection to the land. The Mounted Police protagonist of Frederick Niven's story "The Sun-Dance in the File Hills" (published in 1917 but set fifteen to twenty years ealier), hearing voices keening to the wild throb of Indian drums, realizes that the power behind the sun-dance is based upon humankind's ancient bond to the earth:

> It suddenly struck him that these voices . . . so foreign to a white man's ears, were of **the soil**. Prairie nights had blent with them for ages. Some of the notes, far-carried in the quiet, high and presumably triumphant, were yet full of pathos to him. They were sad as plovers' cries on the moors at home. (133)

The voices awaken subconscious memories from Harry Verdon's own racial past; drawn by their primitive power, he abandons his English public school background and joins the forbidden sun-dance. When Corporal Reid arrives to help him disperse the people, Harry has wooden skewers through his chest and is pulling against the cords that tie them to a pole in

the centre of the circle. The Sioux, Assiniboine and Cree have welcomed him to the sun-dance because they optimistically view his participation as a step toward acceptance of their spiritual tradition: soon the missionaries might disappear and the white man take part in the native religion. Reid's presence, however, silences the drums and dispells the magic they evoke, and Harry sees only some sullen-looking Indians striking camp: "And he felt a certain shame at his downfall, as a boy who thinks he is too old for toys may feel shame on being discovered at play with them" (137). The implications of Harry's lesson are clear--by taking part in the sun-dance he has symbolically descended from the spiritual maturity of Christianity to the child-like primitivism of a heathen, earth-based spirituality. Although Niven expresses genuine sympathy for that tradition, he privileges the Christianity of his own British background above the religious beliefs of an indigenous prairie people.

Missionaries and writers, as representatives of Western culture, needed to destroy the power of a spiritual tradition allied with Nature because they saw the forces of wildness as hostile to human settlement. Nowhere is this imperative more evident than in Oowikapun where Nature is, as Tennyson suggested, "red in tooth and claw." Far from being a benevolent force that leads a person to God and inspires him with gratitude for the gifts of creation, Nature obeys the dictates of Darwin's law and engages in a brutal struggle for survival. When Oowikapun discloses to the old medicine man his disquietude of spirit, Mookoomis advises him to seek the peaceful solitude of the woods where he can "let nature speak to him and soothe his troubled spirit." Oowikapun takes his advice but, Young's narrator tells us firmly, his choice is a bad one. In attempting to find peace in Nature he is imitating those who, "too stubborn or too ignorant" to seek salvation through Jesus, are "trying in some other way to find that peace which God alone can give" (98). Oowikapun,

indeed, soon recognizes his mistake. As he is walking in the forest he comes upon a scene of wild savagery: a "beautiful young" fawn is being mangled by a "great, fierce" wolf. Although Oowikapun kills the brute, he is too late to save "the little innocent fawn, whose great, big, beautiful eyes [are] already glassy in death, and whose lifeblood pouring out from the gaping wounds" (100) crimsons the ground where it has fallen. Young's use of emotionally-loaded language elicits the reader's sympathy for the "innocent" fawn and thereby justifies the slaughter of the "fierce" wolf. In a similar fashion he engages our sympathy for the "beautiful kingfisher" when a "fierce hawk" (101) robs it of its prey and for Oowikapun when he is struck by lightning, which first stuns him and then causes a large birch tree to crush his tent. Although the author does not say directly that wild Nature must be destroyed in order to protect helpless animals--and humans--from its savage cruelty, he certainly leads the reader to that conclusion. His **stated** conclusion, however, is not that Nature is bad, but that only Jesus can grant wisdom and comfort: "Since the fall, and the entrance of sin . . . into this once glorious world of ours, the study of nature . . . without the light of revelation to clear up her mysteries, is more apt to drive men from God than to draw them to him" (103). Read in the context of the novel, Young is suggesting that only through the mediation of Christianity, with its attendant blessing of civilization, can humans safely understand and experience Nature[7]. Only when Nature is controlled does she cease to threaten human well-being.

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[7]Connor's story of Gwen's fall in The Sky Pilot symbolically illustrates Christianity's supremacy over uncontrolled Nature. The girl grows up "wild . . . wilful and wicked" (141) without the benefit of either civilization or religion. When an accident leaves her permanently unable to walk or ride, however, she learns that the Christian "flowers" (181) of gentleness, meekness and self-control are of greater sweetness than the freedom of the open range or the wild beauty of her beloved canyon.

Young makes this point symbolically, although not very subtly, in his description of the final episode in Oowikapun's abortive quest to find peace in Nature. The aurora borealis which lights up the sky with its magnificent brilliance reveals, at the same time, the cruelty hidden beneath the surface beauty of the wild. Initially the "dazzling whiteness" appears to span the sky in an "arch of truce from heaven to earth." It lights the heavens with rainbow-coloured streamers which set the sky aglow. Then the lights change and form themselves into "battalions of soldiers" (111) which turn the heavens red from the blood of battle. The ruby streamers become "great battle flags" which lead the contending troops to "greater deeds of valor", and then change into "great fiery swords" which add to the "carnage and destruction" (112). The climax of this display, when it comes, is so overwhelming in its brutal power that it leaves Oowikapun stunned and helpless:

> Then in a twinkling of an eye the whole changed to a deep, blood-red crimson--so bloodlike, so terrible, so dazzling, so awful, that the brave man was crushed down, terrified and subdued before this blinding display of the omnipotent power of the Great Spirit. (113)

Young's use of the language of military battle in his description of the aurora borealis points to the gist of his quarrel with wild Nature. Beneath its beauty it is fierce and savage. Since it threatens to overwhelm man, its spirit must be destroyed and its power harnessed to do his bidding. Nature is not evil; it is unruly and must be controlled. Christianity, Young suggests, offers a civilizing force which can subdue its wildness.

Young's ideology, however, blinds him to the irony inherent in his response to Nature. The narrator, in commenting on Oowikapun's experience of Nature's cruelty during his sojourn in the wilderness, notes disapprovingly that the strong seem "ever tyrannizing

over the weak" (101). The episode which initiates the action of Oowikapun's quest for personal and social redemption, however, throws a different light on this issue. Oowikapun, hearing of a place where gray wolves are numerous, decides to kill some of these "fierce brutes" (6) for their warm skins. He sets his traps, baits them with dead rabbits, and carefully covers his tracks and other evidence of his presence. The next morning he finds that a wolf, attracted by the rabbit, has been caught in one of his traps. He resolves to kill the beast with the back of his axe, but before he can do so the "treacherous brute" (8) seizes his left arm and cuts it almost to the bone with his sharp teeth. The irony that Young fails to address centres on the issue of treachery and evil. Why is it wrong for the wolf to attack Oowikapun in self-defence, but not wrong for Oowikapun to kill it for its warm fur? Why is it wrong for the other wolf to kill a fawn for its meat, but not wrong for Oowikapun to kill it in reprisal? The answer, I think, points to the anthropocentric nature of Young's value judgements. Nature is good and valuable in so far as it serves human need, but bad when it threatens human supremacy. The fear of wildness which surely inspired his account of Oowikapun's wilderness journey causes him to identify with the victims of predators, rather than with the predators who must kill if they are to eat. Wild Nature, even if it does not threaten man directly, threatens him symbolically when it causes death and destruction. The irony, of course, is in the realization that what Young condemns in Nature is a cause for self-congratulation in humans. "The conquest of territory," Kreisel reminds us, "is by definition a violent process" (11). Yet the Europeans who slaughtered the buffalo and violently subdued the native population in order to make way for settlement rapidly became the folk heroes of their generation. Missionaries, although not participating directly in either warfare or the hunt, served as "harbingers of the new order" (Francis, R. Douglas 44) who, by perpetuating

the values of civilization, contributed to the destruction of wildness in the West.

There is no doubt that many of the men who devoted their lives to spreading the word of God in the wilderness were devout individuals who genuinely believed in the value of their work and who sincerely cared for the welfare of their native flocks. Leaving family, friends and the familiarity of their own culture, they cheerfully endured a way of life that they must often have found lonely and uncomfortable. To recognize the contribution that these often-heroic missionaries made to the destruction of wildness is not to condemn them for wrong-doing but to question, now, the philosophical basis of the Christianity that they represented. By equating Christianity with civilization and British culture, and by equating native animism with ignorance, superstition and savagery, Victorian missionaries prepared the way for the settlement of the West. In doing so, they helped to sound the death-knell for wild Nature and for an indigenous culture well-adapted to the ecological constraints of the Canadian prairies.

Chapter Four

Destroying the Aboriginal "Other": Cultural Genocide in Lords of the North and The Fur Bringers

> . . . each of us is the other's barbarian; to become such a thing, one need only speak a language of which that other is ignorant. . . . from this point of view, there is no man or race which is not barbarian in relation to another man or another race.
>
> - Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, 1984[1]

Traditional religious belief was not the only aspect of First Nations culture that posed a threat to the dominant social order in the Canadian West. Equally threatening were those characteristics (both real and imagined) which a civilized people ascribed to dwellers of the wilderness--the fiery independence, the ungoverned love of freedom and the unbridled expression of savage passion. The anarchistic image of the wild man both fueled the white settler's sense of insecurity and offered unruly youth an alternative to the hard, but necessary, work of homesteading. In order to legitimate the suppression of oppositional values that challenged the ideology of Western civilization, writers of popular romance frequently portrayed aboriginal people as either villainous barbarians or ignorant savages. Agnes Laut in Lords of the North (1900) uses the form of the captivity narrative to illustrate the uncivilized, and therefore heinous, behavior of the primitive red man. Hulbert Footner in The Fur Bringers: A Story of the Canadian Northwest (1920) uses the form of an adventure

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[1]pp. 190-1.

story to portray aboriginal and Métis people as either unscrupulous and cunning or naive, childlike and dependent. Both novels, by focusing on the heroic behavior of the white protagonists and the malicious or weak behavior of the native and Métis characters, invalidate the traditional culture that existed prior to European settlement. In their attempts to destroy the credibility of First Nations people, they function as acts of cultural genocide.

Lords of the North portrays the rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in the early years of the nineteenth century. A journalist who wrote a number of historical works, Laut probably intended her novel as a serious look at an important period in the history of the fur trade and, therefore, of the North West. Almost a century later, however, its importance derives far more from what it tells us about turn-of-the century attitudes to aboriginal culture than from what it tells us about the struggle for power in the Canadian fur trade. Both the story of conflict between the rival companies, which forms the historical background of the novel, and the melodramatic tale of the search for a white woman and child captured by savages, which forms the major plot, serve to impress upon the reader the worthlessness of the native culture which European civilization was replacing.

Although the dedication of Lords of the North, "To the Pioneers and their Descendants, whose heroism won the land," might appear a curious preface to a story about the fur trade, it justly reflects Laut's treatment of the connection between the "great" (4) fur trading companies and the settlement of the West. Her refusal to support one side over the other in the battle between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company suggests that the conflict between the rival factions is not nearly as important as their common role as the "unheralded forerunners of empire." The traders of these companies, the

narrator says without distinguishing between the two, blazed through the wilderness a track that the pioneers would later follow and thus helped to reclaim the North West "from savagery for civilization" (5). The North West Company may have bitterly resented the presence of the Red River settlers, but its exploration of the North American interior, like the exploration of the Hudson's Bay Company, helped to transform "a wilderness into an empire" (10). The fighting between the rival companies, and between the North West Company and the settlers, disguises the most important struggle in the novel--that between aboriginal people and European immigrants for cultural supremacy. As the last paragraph of the novel makes clear, the turmoil within the fur trade was only a temporary condition; it ended a few years later with the union of the two companies in 1821. The Seven Oaks "massacre," one of the bloodiest episodes in a conflict marked by acts of violence, "turned the attention of Britain to this unknown land and the daring heroism of explorers has given place to the patient nation-building of multitudes who follow the pioneer" (442). Laut does not acknowledge the irony inherent in her tribute to the fur traders; although the "lords of the North" may indeed have prepared the way for settlement, farmsteads and villages spelled the demise of a fur-based economy and a way of life dependent upon the continued existence of the wilderness. Her romantic descriptions of the fur trade and of the "witching fascinations of a wild life in a wild, free, tameless land" (181) unwittingly contradict her endorsement of an agricultural economy that would destroy this vision of freedom in an untamed country.

The major storyline of Lords of the North is similarly connected to the values of civilization. The protagonist, narrator Rufus Gillespie, leaves Quebec City as a North West Company trader and clerk in order to search the North West wilderness for his friend Eric Hamilton's wife and son, who have been captured by a savage Indian called Le Grand Diable.

(This search is tied, structurally and thematically, to the narrator's courtship of Frances Sutherland. Both women represent a **white** culture which is the antithesis of native "savagery.") Most of Rufus's adventures stem, directly or indirectly, from obstacles that he must overcome in his quest to redeem Miriam and young Eric from the horrors of captivity. The novel ends with the triumph of white Europeans over their Indian foes and with the information that, twenty years later, young Eric has become a missionary (and thus an agent of Western culture) in the northern wilderness.

The captivity narrative, almost by definition, is a romance genre that privileges civilization above wildness. From the seventeenth-century Puritan tales of Christian redemption to the late-nineteenth-century accounts of overcoming native resistance to white supremacy, the captivity narrative served to instill in its readers an abhorrence of unlicensed savagery and wildness. It functioned, as Frederick Turner notes, as a "drama of fear and resistance" (235) directed against the untamed nature of the New World:

> So the captivity narrative was the perfect scripture for a civilization's sense of its encounter with the wilderness, for in the redemption that rounded it out there was victory. The happy ending was a triumph, an ultimate mastering of everything the wilderness and its natives could throw up in the way of opposition and temptation. (236)

Melodramatic scenes of beautiful, frail white women and their cherubic offspring in the hands of bestial savages created a hierarchy of values that elevated European civilization above the rude, unlettered natural world. By portraying the victory of the former over the wild men whose association with the darkness and chaos of wilderness made them (at least symbolically) a threat to social order, the writers of captivity narratives expressed the white

settlers' fear of wild Nature and justified the suppression of oppositional values held by native people and renegade white men[2]. Their work thus served as a "verbal strategy for testing and controlling the horrors of the wilderness" (Bredahl 11) and for propagating, instead, the ideology of the dominant British culture.

Although the narrator says that he is proud to live in a country where a man is judged by merit rather than creed or caste, he views with suspicion and disgust Indian and Métis cultures that depart from Victorian norms. The "leveling influence" (433) of the West not withstanding, Lords of the North portrays the savage native as a sub-human "other" beyond the pale of decent society. Rufus Gillespie speaks approvingly about the freedom from religious and class prejudice that allows a man to be judged on the basis of his personal worth, but fails to see the Eurocentric bias inherent in that concept of merit. Western democracy allows the Catholic and the Protestant, the rich man and the poor man, to sit down at the same table and to call each other brother, but it disqualifies the "savage" from full personhood. Hayden White, commenting on the changing perception of the "wild man" throughout history, says that Victorians viewed primitive people with a mixture of "fascination and loathing" that he attributes to an insecure sense of their own personhood.

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[2]Historian Sarah Carter notes that the events of 1885 gave rise to increased fears for white women in Western Canada. Public sentiment was outraged when Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock were taken hostage (along with a great number of Métis and aboriginal women and men) by Big Bear's band following hostilities at Frog Lake. Although they were fed and housed as well as their captors, and released unharmed two months later, their captivity fueled a growing sense of insecurity. Even after the resistance was quelled, unfounded rumours of a white woman held captive by Big Bear and a white child held captive by other Indians reflected the heightened tension within the Euro-Canadian community. These stories, however unfounded, served not only "to reaffirm the vulnerability of white women in the West," but also "to provide a rationale for those who wished to secure greater control over the Aboriginal population" (154). Indirectly, then, they helped to strengthen the power of the white people who ruled the West.

By reflecting civilized humanity's primordial roots and its innate potential for savagery, primitive people showed Victorian women and men what they might become if they failed to "cultivate the virtues that had allowed [them] to escape from nature" (Tropics 178). Laut's view of First Nations people as unredeemed savages illustrates this sense of uneasiness, this unexpressed fear that deep within civilized white folk lies a "heart of darkness." Her perception of the differentness between the natives' way of life and the Victorian way of life, however, could only exacerbate that anxiety which "the ambiguity of the concept of humanity" (White, Tropics 194) engendered in women and men who clothed the dark, chaotic sides of themselves with a veneer of civilization. By emphasizing the savagery of her aboriginal characters and the heroism of her white protagonists, Laut helped to suppress this anxiety and to validate the cultural genocide which would destroy the difference between civilized humanity and the aboriginal "other."

The narrator's description of the battle of Seven Oaks and the ensuing victory celebration clearly establishes the unsurpassed savagery of Indian and Métis warriors[3]. Although Rufus had earlier noted that cruelty in warfare is not the monopoly of either white men or red, that neither race "may blamelessly point the finger of reproach at the other" (4), this statement is not accompanied by graphic illustrations of white barbarity. It is, however, followed in the course of the novel by horrific images of Indian and Métis warfare. The aggression, lawlessness and bad judgement of both the Hudson's Bay and the North West companies, as Rufus points out, contributed to the Seven Oaks conflict. His description of the hostilities, however, by contrasting the bungling of the fur trade companies with the

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[3]In her notes to Chapter XXVIII of The Conquest of the Great Northwest, Volume II, Laut refers to the "full account" (199) of Seven Oaks to be found in Lords of the North. Evidently she considered her novel a reputable source of information.

savagery of the Indian and Métis hordes, makes the latter the real villains of that battle. Laut's account of events leading to the battle of Seven Oaks acknowledges Hudson's Bay and North West responsibility for escalating violence between the two companies, points out that both sides attempted to pit the Indians against the other and notes the importance of accident in determining the tragic outcome of the conflict. A small group of North West clerks accompanied by a band of armed Métis and Indians, passing close to the settlement at Red River on their way to meet Nor'Wester boats containing important food supplies, were met at Seven Oaks by twenty-eight Hudson's Bay men who attempted to halt their advance. Francois Boucher, a North West Clerk, was sent forward to parley with Governor Semple of the Red River Colony. After an exchange of insults Semple ordered the arrest of Boucher, who had jumped off his horse when Semple grabbed it by its bridle. "Whether, when Boucher jumped down, our bloodthirsty knaves thought him shot and broke from Grant's control to be avenged," the narrator says, "or whether Lieutenant Holt of the Hudson's Bay at that unfortunate juncture discharged his weapon by accident, will never be known" (335). Although Rufus is a trader for the North West Company he carefully avoids blaming either side for the onset of fighting. By calling his Métis allies "bloodthirsty knaves," however, he assigns to them moral responsibility for the bloodshed that follows. The Indians and Métis, rather than either fur trade company, are the villains of Laut's tale.

A comparison of two passages, one describing events leading to the fighting and the other describing the battle itself, illustrates the way in which Laut uses language in order to privilege the position of the white fur traders. The narrator, commenting on the meeting of Hudson's Bay men with the Nor'Westers at Seven Oaks, suggests that the encounter results from mistakes made by both sides rather than from evil intent:

> To this day I cannot account for the madness of the thing. There, some twenty, or thirty Hudson's Bay men--mere youths most of them--were coming with all speed to head us off from the river path. . . . What this pigmy band thought it could do against our armed men, I do not know. The blunder on their part was so unexpected and inexcusable, it never dawned on us the panic-stricken settlers had spread a report of raid, and these poor valiant defenders had come out to protect the colony. If that be the true explanation of their rash conduct in tempting conflict, what were they thinking about to leave the walls of their fort during danger? My own opinion is that with Lord Selkirk's presumptuous claims to exclusive possession in Red River and the recent high-handed success of the Hudson's Bay, the men of Fort Douglas were so flushed with pride they did not realize the risk of a brush with the **Bois-Brulés**. Much, too, may be attributed to Governor Semple's inexperience; but it was very evident the purpose of the force deliberately blocking our path was not peaceable. If the Hudson's Bay blundered in coming out to challenge us, so did we, I frankly admit; for we regarded the advance as an audacious trick to hold us back till the Fort William express could be captured. (332-333)

The narrator's choice of nouns and adjectives downplays the aggression of the Hudson's Bay men and decreases their responsibility for the bloody deeds that follow. The men are "valiant defenders" of the colony rather than hostile attackers. Their age--"mere youths most of them"--and the "inexperience" of Governor Semple helps to excuse their "blunder[s]." Even Rufus's most pointed criticism is comparatively gentle in tone--the Hudson's Bay men are

guilty not of deliberate aggression but of "rash conduct," "pride" and behavior that is "not peaceable" when they block the path of the Nor'Westers. The narrator concludes by acknowledging that although the Hudson's Bay men "blundered" in coming out to challenge them, the Nor'Westers erred equally in their hot-headed response to this challenge. The general effect of his words is to charge both parties with no greater sins than bad judgement and excessive enthusiasm for their cause.

In his account of the battle itself, however, the narrator uses animal imagery to invalidate the **Bois-Brulés**' "murderous onslaught," which drenches the prairie with the "innocent blood" of the Hudson's Bay men. The Métis warriors are like savage beasts that mercilessly kill their gallant foes:

> I had dismounted and was beating the scoundrels back with the butt end of my gun, begging, commanding, abjuring them to desist, when a Hudson's Bay youth swayed forward and fell wounded at my feet. There was the baffled, anguished scream of some poor wounded fellow driven to bay, and I saw Laplante across the field, covered with blood, reeling and staggering back from a dozen red-skin furies, who pressed upon their fagged victim, snatching at his throat like hounds at the neck of a beaten stag. With a bound across the prostrate form of the youth, I ran to the Frenchman's aid. Louis saw me coming and struck out so valiantly, the wretched cowards darted back just as I have seen a miserable pack of open-mouthed curs dodge the last desperate sweep of antlered head. That gave me my chance, and I fell on their rear with all the might I could put in my muscle. . . . (336)

One curious feature of this passage is the inclusion of "red-skin furies" in the Métis force.

Although neither Friesen's recent account of the battle of Seven Oaks, nor Laut's own account in Volume II of The Conquest of the Great Northwest, mention the presence of Indians, Laut gives them a prominent role in the hostilities[4]. Since Indians have fewer traits in common with white folk than do the Métis, she thus emphasises the **difference** between the fur traders and the Nor'Westers' "savage" allies. Another curious feature of the passage is the way in which Laut uses language to privilege the fur traders above the Métis mob. Most striking is Rufus's pejorative description of men who are his **allies**. The Métis warriors are "scoundrels," "red-skin furies" who press upon their victim "like hounds," "wretched cowards" who behave like a "miserable pack of open-mouthed curs." By contrast, his descriptions of the Hudson Bay men portray them as hapless victims even though one of them is a turn-coat and the other a traitor to the cause of European civilization. The Hudson's Bay youth, whose subsequent death Laut describes with full Victorian pathos, is a former Nor'Wester who sells his company's secrets to the highest bidder and Louis Laplante is a renegade Frenchman who thwarts Rufus in his pursuit of Miriam (although he does finally redeem himself). Rufus, however, is on the side of **white** men. Although historians such as Friesen now insist that the Métis were not "ruthless, thoughtless renegades who fought from some primordial bloodlust . . . but soldiers in what they perceived to be a just cause"

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[4]Possibly Laut cannot bear to lay total blame for the "massacre" on men who share her European ancestry. Indeed, her narrator's evaluative descriptions of the men who marry Indian women suggests the acceptability of half-breeds who follow British norms. The Frenchman who "cast[s] off civilization like an ill-fitting coat" and virtually becomes an Indian when he marries a native woman is inferior to the Scotch settler who educates his native wife "up to his own level" and whose children become "civilized." The Frenchman is the irresponsible "wild man, the Ishmaelite of the desert," while the Scotsman is "the tiller of the soil, the Israelite of the plain" (145). The narrative voice clearly privileges men who accept the values of civilization. Since Indians were less civilized than the Métis, it was easy to credit them with the atrocities of Seven Oaks.

(Canadian Prairies 76), Red River apologists such as Laut attempted to bolster the only-recently-secure position of white settlers by destroying the credibility of First Nations and Métis people[5].

Laut's treatment of the aftermath of Seven Oaks further invalidates the oppositional cultures of both Indians and Métis. Her narrator's description of the "hideous scene" (341) of celebration after Seven Oaks bluntly portrays the victors as bestial savages:

> Decked out in red-stained trophies with scalps dangling from their waists, the natives darted about like blood-whetted beasts; and the half-breeds were little better, except that they thirsted more for booty than life. There was loud vaunting over the triumph, the ignorant rabble imagining their warriors heroes of a great battle, instead of the murderous plunderers they were. (342)

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[5]J. H. McCulloch's account of the battle of Seven Oaks and its aftermath is even more hostile to the Métis position. Donald Stewart, narrator and protagonist of The Men of Kildonan (1926), is one of Lord Selkirk's settlers. Not surprisingly, he views with dislike and suspicion the Nor'Westers who try to destroy the Red River settlement. Although he recognizes that Governor Semple behaves arrogantly and unwisely in tearing down the North-West Company's Fort Gibraltar and in capturing Pembina House, "against which the settlers had no just complaint" (218), his description of the battle is a one-sided account of good against evil. The Hudson's Bay men and their allies are heroes who gallantly attempt to defend the new settlement, while the men who fight to defend the Métis nation are nothing but "bloodthirsty invaders" (225) and murderous villains.

Rufus depicts the Indians as blood-thirsty barbarians, the Métis as greedy freebooters and both groups as "murderous plunderers" instead of the soldier victors of a military battle. He then recounts the victory song that the Métis poet Pierre Falcon wrote to celebrate the events of Seven Oaks, but Laut herself, in a footnote to the text, makes it clear that the poet's views are not her own. Falcon exults that the Métis won a battle against tyrants in order to preserve their freedom; Laut observes that these sentiments express "the views of the savage toward the white man" and goes on to point out the similarity between native people and the predators of Nature: "The Indian nature[6] is more in harmony with the hawk and the coyote than with the white man; hence the references [in Falcon's poem]" (342). The poet observes triumphantly that Governor Semple lies naked and dead on the plain "Where the carrion hawk, and the sly coyote / Greedily feast on the great and the least," and says that the hawk laughs at this once-powerful man who tried to enslave his people: "'Ha-ha,' laughed the hawk. Ho-ho! Let him mock. / 'Plain rangers ride forth to slay, to slay'" (343). Do these lines confirm Laut's view, expressed not only in the footnote but also throughout the entire novel, that First Nations people are bestial savages socially and morally inferior to white folk? Whether Falcon uses the hawk and the coyote as metaphors for the Bois Brulés, or personifies them in order to suggest their roles as allies of his people, he clearly sees identification with wild Nature as good. Laut, on the other hand, views Nature as savage and threatening, as a force that must be subdued and controlled in order to make the West safe for settlement. Although they both use animal imagery in their descriptions of the Métis, Falcon rejoices in an association with Nature that empowers his people while Laut uses that

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[6]Again, Laut is lumping together the Indians and Métis (even though the references in Falcon's poem are to the **Bois-Brulés**). Both thus become the savage "other."

association to invalidate aboriginal and Métis culture.

Laut's treatment of a buffalo hunt as a military adventure reinforces the "truth" of a syllogism that permeates the novel: if wild Nature is a threatening force that must be conquered, and if native people share the characteristics of that force, then it follows that aboriginal and Métis culture must be destroyed in order for European immigrants to dominate both the human and non-human inhabitants of the West. The narrator's comparison of the hunters to Norse heroes and Viking warriors, and of the hunting cavalcade to a "martial column" (200), immediately establishes the war-like nature of the buffalo hunt. The buffalo themselves are savage beasts, worthy foes in a territorial battle for supremacy: "Protruding eyes glared savagely sideways. Great, thick necks hulked forward in impatient jerks; and those dagger-pointed horns, sharper than a pruning hook, promised no boy's sport for our company" (206). In the combat that follows, the warring sides initially appear evenly matched, although the superior strength of the human party soon asserts itself:

> In a moment there was a battle royal between dexterous savages, swift as tigers, and these leviathans of the prairie with their brute strength. . . . . Instantly, the ravine was ablaze with shots. Showers of arrows from the Indian hunters sung through the air overhead. Men unhorsed, ponies thrown from their feet, buffaloes wounded--or dead--were scattered everywhere. . . . Carcasses were mowed down like felled trees; but still we plunged on and on, pursuing the racing herd. . . . (207)

The author follows this scene of carnage with a Sioux attack on a small group of hunters who stray from the main cavalcade. The violence and bloodiness of the human battle, juxtaposed with a buffalo hunt described in terms of war, suggest a parallel between savage Indians and

savage beasts. By equating Indians with herds of wild buffalo and, later, with predatory Nature, Laut makes the conquest of First Nations people acceptable to her readers. She is thus able to celebrate without reservation the courage of the fur-traders whose heroism helped to claim the North West for European settlement.

In contrast to the savagery of the Indians and Métis is the moral rectitude of white civilization. It is surely no accident that Laut's narrator emphasizes the **whiteness** of the female protagonists, for their virtue lies in their **difference** from native people. Rufus's first description of Frances Sutherland, the woman whom he loves, is of a "fair, white face" set against a background of wavy golden hair "clustered down from the blue-veined brow to the bit of white throat visible" (104). No swarthy, dark-haired beauty, Frances is an angel of goodness and light whose **whiteness** he refers to on at least six occasions. Her influence prevents him from sinking into barbarity when, isolated from white society during a long stay with the Mandanes, he is tempted to participate in native life: "Hers was the influence that aroused loathing for the drunken debauches, the cheating, the depraved living of the Indian lodges: hers, the influence that kept the loathing from slipping into indifference, the indifference from becoming participation" (232). Those men who do succumb to temptation are weak individuals who lack moral fortitude; earlier in the novel Rufus speaks slightingly about the "shaggy-haired . . . degenerate traders, who had lost all taste for civilization and retired with their native wives after the fashion of the north country" (79)[7]. By keeping him

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[7]The Methodist missionary John Maclean is considerably more tolerant than either Laut or Hulbert Footner, both of whom disapprove of white men who marry Indian women. Two stories in The Warden of the Plains describe marriage between upper-class Englishmen and Indian maidens. The union in "Akspine" is a happy one. Although the man in "The White Man's Bride" leaves his Blackfoot wife and returns to England, the narrative voice clearly condemns his heartless behavior. (In "An Episode at Clarke's Crossing" in Prairie Pot-Pourri

on the path of virtue, Frances helps to maintain British solidarity in the face of an oppositional culture.

Laut's treatment of two other white characters--the captive Miriam and the renegade Frenchman Louis Laplante--further elevates European immigrants above Métis and aboriginal people. Miriam exudes the piety, goodness and quiet heroism of a Victorian heroine. The narrator's account of his initial meeting with her and her son in the camp of the enemy Sioux privileges the behavior of white women and children above the undisciplined action of the "naked brats" who swarm after him with the persistence of "vicious dogs" and the immodest enthusiasm of "bevies of young squaws, who ogle newcomers to the Indian camps" (266). Miriam is sitting demurely in her tent, crooning words of love to the child in her arms. Her response to little Eric's desire to protect her from harm shows a sensitivity, piety and grace that is surely superior to anything that the vulgar Indian women can muster:

> "My brave, brave little Eric! My only one, all that God has left to me!" she sobbed hiding her weeping face on the child's neck. "O my God, let me but keep my little one! Thou hast given him to me and I have treasured him as a jewel from Thine own crown! O my God, let me but keep my darling, keep him as Thy gift--and--and--O my God! Thy--Thy--Thy will be done!" (274)

This sentimental scene of maternal love and spiritual fortitude, designed to wring tears from tender-hearted readers, is completed by little Eric's bedtime prayers. Both the pious sentiments and the formal use of Thou, Thy and Thine in the address of God provide clues to Miriam's moral worth and privilege her above her savage sisters. Since the dominant

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Kate Simpson Hayes tells a similar story of an unfaithful missionary who jilts his Indian fiancé for an English noblewoman when his Bishop recalls him to London.) Indian women in these stories are not heathen "others," but exemplary sweethearts, wives and mothers.

Western culture provides the measure by which all people are judged, her adherence to Victorian standards of piety and domestic virtue easily establishes her superiority to her cruel captors. Similarly, the gallantry of Laplante (like the gallantry of Ralph Connor's Dick Raven, whose role as villain-turned-hero in The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail I will discuss in chapter 5) redeems him from past sins and sets him above the brutish Indian men with whom he lived in the wilderness. Although his initial failure to save Miriam established him as a villain, he dies a hero's death in the act of rescuing her from her captivity.

Lords of the North, by contrasting the savagery and cruelty of Métis and Sioux warriors with the courage and moral worth of the men and women who defend the values of European civilization, creates a dichotomy between the two worlds of the novel. The men who plunder and kill at Seven Oaks are barbarians; the captors of an innocent white woman are heartless villains. The fur traders, on the other hand, are the advance-guard of civilization and the rescuers of Miriam are gallant individuals who risk (or sacrifice) their lives for others. Laut thus invalidates aboriginal and Métis culture. When the "good guys" are civilized white folk and the "bad guys" are savages associated with wild Nature, who would want to be an Indian or a member of the **Bois Brulés**?

American novelist Hulbert Footner, like Agnes Laut, establishes the superiority of white civilization although his Indians are not so much savages as they are simple-minded, childlike people dependent upon the white man's power and wisdom. The only powerful non-whites in The Fur Bringers are a villainous half-breed man who kills himself at the end of the novel and a half-breed girl who is shot by hostile Indians. Footner makes no claim to historical accuracy--his fur traders exist in an imaginary North West isolated from the rest of the world and they trade with the imaginary Kakisas Indians. Like other American writers

such as James Oliver Curwood, whose The Flaming Forest: A Novel of the Canadian Northwest (1923) is set in a country based entirely upon the author's imagination, Footner views the North West as an exotic setting for romantic tales of adventure. His novel is useful, however, in illustrating changing attitudes to native people. By 1920, twenty years after the publication of Lords of the North, Indians were no longer a threat to white supremacy; only occasional upstarts like Footner's Gordon Strange present any obstacle to social and economic dominance. The author's paternalism represents a different form of cultural genocide--by portraying native people as foolish and incompetent, and white people as strong and wise, he dismisses the value of traditional aboriginal culture.

The hero's quest in The Fur Bringers is to establish a successful independent fur trade post in the North West (and, as in virtually all these romances, to win the hand of the woman he loves). In order to achieve his goal Ambrose Doane must obtain the respect and goodwill of the Métis and of the Kakisas Indians who, when the story starts, trade with John Gaviller, representative of a big trading company and father of his beloved Colina. He must also overcome the opposition of Gaviller's unscrupulous half-breed bookkeeper, Gordon Strange, who is second in command at Fort Enterprise. In the course of his quest he encounters four distinct representatives of the Indian and Métis people: the Grampierres, who hold the values of white civilization but are content to maintain their low status within the power hierarchy; Nesis, the half-breed girl who sacrifices her life for Ambrose's safety; Gordon Strange, who wants to be wealthy and powerful like the white men in command; and the Kakisis who, although foolish (and sometimes dangerous) in their pretention to equal footing with the white man, are normally harmless. By equating the "good" half-breeds with the people who support Ambrose's interests and the "bad" half-breeds and Indians with people who oppose

them, Footner denies the validity of an alternative value system and, at the same time, challenges the right of indigenous people to compete with white people on terms of equal power[8].

Footner's more general treatment of Indians reflects a paternalistic attitude to a culturally "inferior" race. The narrative voice is critical of Gaviller, who sees Indians as, at best, foolish children and who angrily accuses Ambrose of attempting to destroy "what it has taken two centuries to build up--the white man's supremacy" (58). Since we know that the Indians who trade with him are on the verge of starvation as a result of his unfair trade practices, we can easily discredit this view. Ambrose, however, is the hero, yet his concept of native people is remarkably similar to Galliver's. "If we think of what we were like ourselves before we put on long trousers it helps to understand them" (49), he tells the older man. Indians, in his view, are like schoolboys-not evil or stupid, but immature and easily led into trouble. He knows that it would not do to marry an Indian or Métis woman, as his partner Peter has done, and he knows that he will have to move away from Moultrie when he marries Colina because he cannot expect her to live in the same trading post as Peter's half-breed wife: "It would be a horrible situation" (74). Ambrose is not cruel and he does not hate Indians; his arrogance is the result of overwhelming complacency regarding white superiority.

Simon Grampierre's acceptance of this superiority induces him to give Ambrose a

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[8]Marion Keith's fictional account of the North West fur trade in the 1860s similarly privileges white culture by portraying aboriginal and mixed-blood people as child-like both in their loyalty to the powerful white man and in their rebellion against his superior strength. The "good" Indians and Métis in A Gentleman Adventurer (1924) faithful serve their white masters and identify Hudson's Bay Company interests as their own, while the "bad" rebels support Louis Riel in his unsuccesful challenge to white supremacy.

leadership role in the quarrel with Gaviller. The old Métis has previously provided direction to the Indians and half-breeds dissatisfied with Gaviller's treatment of them. As his son Tole proudly tells Ambrose, Simon is educated; he reads, writes and speaks English and French and Cree. Tole connects these abilities, and the success of the Grampierre family, to the white blood of his grandfathers: "My fat'er's fa'ter, my mot'er's fat'er, they white men. We are proud people. We own plenty land. We live in a good house. We are workers" (62). The Grampierres, however, are not like Gordon Strange. They know their place, and gracefully relinquish power to the white man who enters their world: "Such is the potency of the white man's eye that the leader of the breeds had unhesitatingly yielded the direction of affairs to the youth who was little more than a third of his age" (133). Footner is not simply a realist who recognizes that white supremacy is a regrettable but undeniable fact of life. By giving the Grampierres the hero's blessing he clearly indicates his own approval of their compliance. By contrasting their behavior with that of Strange he extols their superior "wisdom." In the Grampierre's deference to Ambrose Doane, Footner privileges the exemplary response of strong Métis men to a youthful representative of the "master" race.

Nesis, a heroic young half-breed woman, illustrates by her sacrifices a second appropriate response to white superiority. Like Moon in Harwood Steele's Spirit-of-Iron (which I discuss in chapter 6), Nesis falls in love with the hero and wants to marry him. Unable to persuade him to accept her as a wife, she yet betrays her own people and risks her life in order to help him escape from his Kakisas prison. Nesis's sympathies are unequivocally with white people. She identifies with her Métis father rather than her Kakisas mother, and proudly tells Ambrose that her white blood makes her different from the other Indian women: "I think women's talk foolish. Many tam my fat'er say to me, Angleys

talk mak' men strong" (211). Nesis, who speaks "Angleys talk," does indeed gain power from her knowledge of the white man's tongue. Attracted by the sound of English-speaking voices, she overhears the plans for treason that Strange discusses with his Kakisas side-kick Watusk. Her knowledge of these plans clears Ambrose's name when she is able to prove that it was Strange, and not Ambrose, who incited the Kakisas to rebellion. "Nesis attached a mysterious virtue to the ability to speak English" (299), Colina tells the court that is trying Ambrose. This "virtue" benefits the hero (and white civilization in general)--but it costs Nesis her life. Watusk, jealous of her father's ability to speak English, had several years earlier arranged to have him killed in order to maintain his monopoly on the language of power. When he discovers that Nesis, too, can speak with the white man's voice, he has her tongue cut from her mouth. Later she is shot by one of his henchmen when she flees the Kakisas camp with Colina. Her death is not punishment for her arrogance in learning English (which Footner surely is not opposed to), but symbolically represents the necessary suppression of Native aspirations to political and cultural equality. Figuratively a usurper of the white man's tongue, Nesis loses both her voice and her life when she exercises its power.

The villainous Gordon Strange, ironically, suffers the same fate as the gentle Nesis, and for the same reason--both are interlopers in the white man's world of power. Strange is a suave, handsome man who, in Ambrose's opinion, speaks English "too fluent[ly]" for "one of his colour." Ambrose is affronted by his frank, open manner, which "isn't natural" (76) in a half-breed and seems to mock the demeanour of the well-bred Englishman. His early dislike and distrust of Strange is based not upon knowledge of the man's character, but upon resentment of this upstart half-breed's presumption of equality with the white man: "The better men among the natives, such as Tole Grampierre, have a pride of their own; but they

never presume to the same footing as the white men. Strange, however, talked as one gentleman to another" (77). The authorial voice is indignant that one of these natives has the audacity to claim equal status with the members of a superior race. Although we learn, as the novel progresses, that Strange is a liar and a hypocrite, it is his ambition that condemns him in the hero's eyes. Colina insists that the bookkeeper has served her father well, but this information does not allay Ambrose's fears; he warns her not to let Strange run the Company's affairs while Gaviller is recovering from serious injuries: "After all, he is not one of us" (98). Footner is not suggesting that Indians and half-breeds should revert to the "savagery" of their ancestors; indeed, his narrator praises the Grampierres for their prosperity and for their success in farming. He uses the negative persona of Gordon Strange, however, to illustrate the hazards of letting "natives" have an equal voice in determining the economic and political direction of the West.

Footner's depiction of the Kakisas illustrates a fourth perspective on aboriginal people--the Indian as credulous child who must be guided by the white man. Although the Kakisas support Strange in his plans to overthrow white government, they do so because they are naive rather than rebellious. Watusk, their leader, is a "bad" man but his followers are merely gullible. Ambrose, indeed, likes and respects these simple people who, although ignorant, have the honesty of a child: "They seemed to him a real people, largely unspoiled as yet by the impact of a stronger race" (233). The narrator's description of their raid on the Fort Enterprise store depicts them as savage and brutish, but it is the white man's whiskey (and their gullibility in following Strange and Watusk) that leads them into trouble. Even when, under the direction of Watusk, they attempt to increase their power and prestige by incorporating parliamentary institutions into their own government, they are ludicrous and

pathetic rather than threatening. Ambrose is more amused than impressed when Watusk, looking like a "quack doctor in poor circumstance" (125), introduces his four councilors:

> ". . . Toma, minister of state; Lookoovar, minister of war; Mahtsonza, minister of interior; Tatateecha, minister of medicine.
>
> Thus their uncouth names as Ambrose got them. He avoided Simon's eye, and bit his lip to keep from laughing. . . .
>
> They understood not a word of what was said, but preserved an unshakable gravity throughout. Ambrose, as they were named, christened them anew, according to their several characteristics: Coyote, Moose, Bear and Weasel. (126)

The narrative voice ridicules Watusk's pretentions. His government ministers, dressed in ill-fitting clothes from the store, have "uncouth names" and resemble wild beasts rather than dignified statesmen. They fail to understand not only English, but also the meaning of civilized institutions. Led by a man who is himself a tool in Gordon Strange's hand, the Kakisas council demonstrates the emptiness of mere **forms** of power.

Although Strange and Watusk are punished for their illicit ambition, the quest for power is a laudable goal in The Fur Bringers. It is, however, a laudable goal only for white people. Colina, rebuked for her lack of reserve with the Indians and Métis of Fort Enterprise, assures her father that she can afford to be natural with her "inferiors" (27) because they will not dare to take advantage of her good nature. She knows that her superior power enables her to enforce submission to her will. Later, when Germain Grampierre wants her to stay at home rather than set out on a dangerous search for Nesis, she persuades him to follow her: ". . . of course, in the end she had her way . . ." (264). Even the hostile Kakisas cannot thwart

her--they do not want her to take Nesis from their camp but are helpless before the force of her stronger will. Like the man she loves, she knows that she can quell the stoutest hearts. When Ambrose is taken prisoner by the Kakisas and forced to accompany them to their country he is at first afraid, but he regains courage when he reminds himself that he has the power of his race: "'They cannot put it over me unless I knuckle under,' he thought. 'They're afraid of me. No Indian that ever lived can face out a white man when the white man knows his power'" (197). Ambrose, of course, is referring to the moral power that comes from courage and from **a knowledge of one's own superiority**. Although the Kakisas do not want to kill him because they will need him as a scapegoat if anything goes wrong with their plans, they have no such practical reason for letting Colina flee camp with Nesis. Their cowardice in the face of her courage, the narrator suggests, helps to maintain white supremacy.

The abortive end to the Kakisas rebellion, however, illustrates that military force as well as moral strength supports the white man's claim to power. Ambrose warns Watusk that if he fires on the police who come to arrest the leaders, the Kakisas will be wiped out: "The whole power of the government will descend on your head!" (235). Several hundred Indian men are no match for the handful of policemen because the Redcoats are, as the Inspector tells Watusk, "the outposts of a mighty power that encircles the world." If the Kakisas defy that power they will be "wiped out like the prairie grass in a fire" (241). Before this superior force Watusk's bravado vanishes. Although he swaggers and blusters like a schoolyard bully when the Inspector calls him to his presence, in the end he obeys "just as a child must in the end obey a calm, imperative summons" (239). The power of the police, along with the courage and wisdom they display in front of enemy guns, cools Watusk's enthusiasm for

rebellion; he surrenders his forces to these "supermen" (243) and the revolution is over.

Why are the Kakisas and the Métis so helpless that, like the half-starved Selkirk family, they "look to the white man for everything" (87)? Why do Gaviller and Ambrose play such important roles in the lives of these people? Doubtlessly Footner exaggerates the shortcomings of the Kakisas and their mixed-blood brothers in order to glorify the strengths of his own race, but he does have an economic basis for his position. In The Fur Bringers the Kakisas and the Métis become dependent on white people for food because they control access to the milling technology that grinds wheat into flour. Women can no longer grind grain for their families because they no longer have the primitive tools which they once used. "Long tam ago we got stone bowls for grind wild rice in," Watusk tells Ambrose. "So many years we buy flour all the bowls is broke and throw away now" (128). The men who supply this essential foodstuff, of course, acquire positions of considerable power. Indeed, the high stakes generate conflict over control of both wheat prices and the flour supply. This conflict, between trader John Gaviller and his young rival Ambrose Doane, initiates the action of the novel. Gaviller is unwilling to pay the men a decent price for their wheat, and refuses to provide them with flour unless they sell it to him. Since he owns the only mill around, the men are helpless until Ambrose determines to use Gaviller's mill to grind the wheat he has purchased from the Métis. Gaviller objects, and the fight is on. That Footner's story is not historically "accurate" is not as important here as is the author's attitude toward the colonization (and subjugation) of a people. His emphasis on the Indian's and half-breed's childlike **need** for paternalistic trading companies (and, presumably, a paternalistic government) to look after them conceals the significance of sociological and ecological changes that took place in the West during the settlement years. By 1920 the hunter-gatherer

economy of aboriginal people had been destroyed by the institution of private property and by the conversion of wilderness to agricultural land. (Although Footner's novel is set in an imaginary North West wilderness where native people could have maintained a traditional economy compatible with the fur trade, the author reflects a sociological transition that had already taken place in the settled areas of the prairie provinces.) Aboriginal people who had previously supported themselves from the flora and fauna of vast stretches of unbroken prairie and parkland were now confined to reserves which could not support them[9]. In the absence of their own agricultural tradition they became dependent upon white men who controlled access to the technology and expertise needed for grain production and for milling wheat into flour. Government assistance became a fact of life for people whose means of livelihood had been destroyed by the civilization to which they now turned for help.

The conclusion of Footner's novel, by rewarding rather than punishing John Gaviller, undercuts the issue of the fur trade's responsibility to the Indian and Métis people. Although the authorial voice clearly does not endorse Gaviller's refusal to pay a fair price for wheat and furs, the end of the story creates moral ambiguity by failing to tax the trader for his sins. The North West Fur Company asks Gaviller to resign after Ambrose's trial for inciting the Kakisas to rebellion reveals the older man's mismanagement of Fort Enterprise. Gaviller, however, says that he was only following Company policy. Who is really to blame, Gaviller or the Company? The narrative voice does not choose sides, but the plot of the novel exonerates Gaviller. He joins Ambrose, now his son-in-law, as an independent trader and

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[9]As William Cronon notes in his study on the impact of European settlement on the ecology of New England, hunting-gathering people need a much larger land base than do an agricultural people. Cronon points out that the nonagricultural Indians of northern Maine required seven times as much land per capita to support themseves as did the the crop-producing Indians of southern New England (42).

takes charge of a new post. This position identifies him closely with the hero and therefore suggests that Gaviller is acceptable as a representative of the fur trade brotherhood. The trader has wronged innocent people, yet in an otherwise didactic novel neither he nor the Company is punished for this crime. Strange kills himself, Watusk endures humiliation and defeat; even "good" half-breeds like Tole Grampierre and Nesis pay with their lives for Gaviller's misdeeds. The power of white civilization is so strong, however, that its representatives can cheat the members of a "lesser" race with impunity.

With the exception of William Butler's Red Cloud, which depicts First Nations people as noble if tragic figures, the fiction of the Canadian North West fails to give voice to an oppositional culture. Aboriginal folk, even in the handful of short stories whose authors treat them sympathetically, are portrayed at best as a credulous people wise in the ways of woods and plain but foolish and childlike in the way of the world. Roger Pocock, who served in the North West Mounted Police from 1884 to 1887, depicts his Indian protagonist in "The Lean Man" (published in 1888) as an absurd, pathetic individual who gains heroic stature only in death. Although the author's ironic tone, as Dick Harrison notes in Best Mounted Police Stories, cannot mask "a concern for the Indian which was unusual in 1887" (94), his verbal portrait of First Nations people engenders pity but does nothing to empower a culture rapidly being destroyed by civilization. The Lean Man, imprisoned as a result of false allegations made by a cowardly, "mean" (59) white settler, is too sullen and inarticulate to defend himself and is unsuccessful in his attempts to escape from his prison cell. His "magnificent courage" and the "haughty endurance of his barbaric forefathers" are of no avail against the overwhelming power of his captors: "He had cast aside the dross that had come over the Indian character from ruinous contact with the ruling race; he had asserted for once the

inalienable rights of heredity, the greater and manlier past. The change in him was interpreted by the authorities as insanity" (68). Deprived of liberty by representatives of a stronger culture, he strangles himself rather than face the continued humiliation of confinement. The narrator writes admiringly of the courage which enables "the Lean Man" to endure silently the "long agonies of torture" as he takes his life with his own hands, and observes that the Indian goes down to the grave "triumphant" (70). It is, however, a model of triumph that disempowers, for it leaves its hero dead[10]. Pocock's Indian protagonist does not challenge the dominant culture, nor does he learn to survive with pride and dignity in a white man's world. Like another tragic hero, Gilbert Parker's Little Hammer in "A Prairie Vagabond" (Pierre and His People), he prefers death to confinement and dishonour. Little Hammer kills a white trapper who, years earlier, had raped his wife. He gives himself up to the North West Mounted Police, then saves the life of the policeman when they are caught in a blizzard. Although Little Hammer is sentenced by a sympathetic judge to only one month in jail, he kills himself--having achieved his revenge--the night before he is to be freed. Death releases him from dishonour, but it fails to readjust the balance of power or to right social injustice. The tragic hero bears witness against the "proud careless masters of the plains . . . who had driven away the buffalo and sent diseases among the tribes" (Pocock 51) but does not threaten European civilization's dominance of either wild Nature or the aboriginal people who inhabit its vast, open spaces. Pocock and Parker, like William Butler, lament the loss of native self-determination, but cannot envision an alternative culture

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[10]Pocock's short story "Eric" contains a similar tragic hero who takes his own life when he is recaptured after escaping from imprisonment for a crime that he did not commit.

existing alongside the dominant British model[11].

Laut and Footner, less sympathetic to aboriginal and Métis people than either Pocock or Gilbert, unequivocally endorse the values of European civilization. By destroying the credibility of First Nations cultures, their novels help to justify the settlement of the West. Lords of the North portrays native people as brutal savages akin to wild Nature rather than to civilized white folk. It justifies the replacement of wilderness by civilization on the grounds that the native culture associated with wilderness is brutish and therefore unworthy of preservation. The Fur Bringers, on the other hand, portrays Indians and Métis as naive, childlike beings who need the help of white people in order to survive. Those who challenge white supremacy are both wicked and "unnatural," and deserve their punishment of death. It justifies the replacement of wilderness by civilization on the basis of civilization's evident superiority to a traditional culture which cannot provide for its people without outside intervention. Both novels thus validate the Europeanization of the West by a morally and technologically "superior" culture. In their disregard for the integrity of the aboriginal "other," they are works of cultural genocide.

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[11]Thomas King's Medicine River (1989) illustrates the way in which a writer can use comedy to empower an oppositional culture. The First Nations protagonists have an exuberance that gives zest to their lives and a resilience that enables them to survive with dignity in a white-dominated society.

Chapter Five

Making the West Safe for Settlement: Overcoming Native Resistance in Louis Riel the Rebel Chief, Corporal Cameron and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail

> Everywhere that power exists, it is being exercised. No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other. It is often difficult to say who holds power in a precise sense, but it is easy to see who lacks power.
>
> - Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," 1977[1]

In spite of their efforts to teach Native people the values and practises of a mercantile economy, fur traders and Christian missionaries were not entirely successful at suppressing opposition to the destruction of wildness and traditional cultures. What they failed to accomplish by moral persuasion, however, the North West Mounted Police and Canadian military units accomplished by force. They were supported by romance writers such as Charles Gordon (who wrote under the pseudonym Ralph Connor) and Joseph Collins, whose novels justify the use of arms to quell unlawful resistance to authority. Connor and Collins rely not so much on rational argument as on emotional appeal when they make their case for the suppression of rebellion. The courage, virtue and nobility of their heroes enlist readers'

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[1]p. 213.

sympathy for the cause of law and order, and the moral villainy of their rebels prevents them from sympathizing with Indian and Métis discontent. By further associating the rebels with the disorder and chaos of wild Nature, writers of the wilderness romance helped to invalidate resistance to Western civilization and to ensure its victory over the "degraded" savages who attempted to halt its progress.

Although Collins and Connor had very different relationships to the Canadian West, their shared belief in the moral superiority of British institutions to the savagery and discord of Indian and Métis culture provides a common thematic ground for their novels. Collins was an Ontario journalist who, by his own admission, had never so much as set foot in the North West (Annette 142). An ardent Canadian nationalist, he wrote Louis Riel The Rebel Chief (1885) with the overt purpose of inflaming Eastern opinion against the rebels who threatened to destroy his vision of a strong and united nation. In order to safeguard the European agricultural settlement which would provide the basis for a prosperous national economy, this "menace" would have to be removed:

> . . . the duty of the hour is to put an end to the Rebellion. Riel must be captured at any cost; so, too, must Dumont. Men so strongly a menace to public peace as Riel and his bad and fearless ally, Dumont, must not be given the opportunity again of covering the land with blood. There must be a pretty wholesome hanging in the North-West, and the gentlemen whom the authorities must give first attention to are the two villains just named, Poundmaker, Big Bear, Little Pine, Lucky Man, and those bloody wolves who perpetrated the butcheries at Frog Lake. (175)

Riel, Dumont and their Indian allies have disturbed the "public peace"--that is, they have

disturbed the peace of white settlers--and therefore, in Collins's eyes, must be hanged. Although totally devoid of literary merit, his novel is valuable because it clearly illuminates what was a popular, and powerful, view during the latter part of the 1880s. Connor, also born in Ontario, spent most of his adult life working as a Presbyterian minister in the West and is, perhaps as a result of his experiences, far more sympathetic than Collins to the interests of Indian people. Since he wrote his Mounted Police novels more than twenty years after the events of 1885, at a time when the West was already "won," he could afford to take a more generous attitude towards the vanquished Indians and Métis. His account of an abortive Indian uprising in Corporal Cameron (1912) and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail (1914), however, portrays the public good as synonomous with the interests of white settlers. Mandy, youthful bride of the NWMP corporal-turned-rancher who is the hero of the novels, realizes that she must let her husband engage in the dangerous espionage work that would help prevent an Indian uprising. Gallant heroine that she is, she is prepared to "surrender her heart's dearest treasure for her country's good" (Patrol 62). Connor is not indifferent to the welfare of aboriginal people. Like Collins, however, his Eurocentricism blinds him to the existence of an alternative and legitimate Indian view of reality.

Collins uses a melodramatic plot and the motif of a tragic quest to justify his call for vengeance on the Indian and Métis rebels. Although the action culminates in the Rebellion of 1885, the primary plot focuses on the events which led to the formation of Riel's provisional government in 1870. Riel, hunting on the prairies one day, is attracted by the sweet voice and the beauty of Marie, a chaste young Métis woman. He makes advances

toward her, but she is in love with Thomas Scott[2], a heroic young white man whose quest to save civilization from the savage rebels forms much of the novel's action. Riel, mad with jealousy and thwarted passion, vows to win Marie by fair means or foul. When he is defeated in his evil designs he takes vengeance on the hapless Scott, who is captured and put to death by Riel's henchmen. Marie, like a proper tragic heroine, then pines away and dies[3]. Stated thus, the quest is a failure. The hero dies and the villain wins a victory. Collins, however, uses this plot as a preamble to the events of 1885. Read in this context, Scott's failure becomes a martyrdom that serves as a rallying cry for English Canadians. His death becomes a moral justification for war and for control of the vast, fertile lands "ready for the plough" (16) that are the rewards of conquest. Although Scott does not live to see his victory, Riel's ultimate capture and death, announced in newspaper accounts appended to the novel, represent the symbolic achievement of his quest for social salvation.

Connor's hero Allan Cameron is a young Scotsman who emigrates to Canada to make his fortune; his quest, however, is not for personal wealth but for the political stability necessary to the achievement of general economic prosperity. After working for a time as a farmhand in Ontario he joins the North West Mounted Police and moves west to the foothills of what is now Alberta. Later, when he marries Mandy, he settles down and becomes one of the ranchers whose "faith and courage" drive them to construct the solitary shacks and

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[2]Scott is based, in name at least, on the Ontario man whose "murder" by Riel's provisional government in 1870 so outraged English Protestant Canada.

[3]Annette the Metis Spy, which Collins wrote the following year, has a plot similar to The Rebel Chief except that the white hero and his Métis sweetheart marry and live happily ever after. Since the Rebellion had already been won, Collins no longer needed the pathos of dying lovers to inflame his readers against the rebels. Instead, in good Victorian tradition, he could celebrate victory with the union of his hero and heroine.

isolated ranch houses that form the "brave vanguard of civilization" (Patrol 142). Cameron's idyllic life with his bride, however, is soon shattered by the threat of an Indian uprising. When his house is burned to the ground by one of its leaders he embarks on a heroic quest to save his country from the "unspeakable horrors" (Cameron 437) of an Indian war. This quest, which constitutes the plot of The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail, concludes with the obliteration of the Indian forces and the return of Cameron to domestic tranquility in a West made safe for civilization.

In order to justify the suppression of "rebellions" that threaten British and Canadian interests, Collins and Connor create histories that privilege the white forces who battle to save the West for European settlement above the First Nations forces who attempt to protect a traditional way of life. This chapter will examine the ways in which these authors empower "their" side at the expense of the savage "others." Collins first establishes the legitimacy of the British presence in the West, and then destroys the credibility of the "rebels" by associating them with unruly Nature and the unsavoury villains of melodrama. Connor contrasts the barbaric behavior of the Indian and Métis hordes to the chivalry and patriotic fervour of the gallant women and men who defend civilization, and establishes the morally and numerically superior force of the Anglo-Canadian side. Both authors thus elevate European civilization above a traditional way of life associated with the prairie wilderness.

Collins's recognition of the need to suppress rebellion in order to protect Anglo-Canadian economic interests led him to defend the settlement rights of British immigrants. His protagonist speaks for the author when he insists that the defenders of civilization have moral right and legitimate authority on their side. Scott, having escorted Marie to a place of

safety, tells her that he must return to Red River to help protect agricultural settlements sanctioned by the will of the people, the military force of the Empire and the interest of the western prairie itself:

> "It is to thwart [Riel], to cast in my strength on the side of peace, in the interest of those fertile plains, that I return. You do not suppose that this licentious fanatic can ultimately prevail against the will of the people of Canada, against the military force of the Empire of Great Britain. The sovereign of our mighty realm tolerates in no land any dispute of her authority, and this mad uprising will be crushed as I might stamp out the feeble splutter of a bed-room taper." (84)

Scott, with the tunnel vision of a man who complacently sees the British Empire as the pinnacle of civilization, assumes that the interest of the "fertile plains" is synonomous with the interest of Canadian and British settlers. Even if it had occurred to this author that the fertility of the plains had been safeguarded during thousands of years of native occupation, he would doubtlessly have rejected this stewardship on the grounds that Indian people had not "used" the land and that its fertility had therefore been wasted. Scott concludes that the settlers have a "right" to occupy the plains because the force of their will and the power of the British Empire guarantee their claim to sovereignty. Resorting to the ancient contention that "might is right," he needs no other justification, finally, for the armed suppression of native rebellion.

Collins reinforces his hero's position, however, by further explaining the grounds for British sovereignty in the West. Early in the novel he creates a conversation between a young Cree chief and Lord Selkirk regarding the validity of Selkirk's claim to ownership of a

huge tract of land in the Red River area. Collins's description of the participants immediately empowers Selkirk by drawing attention to his superior status. The young chief, who has a nose "like a hawk's beak" and an eye "like the eagle's" (17), is compared to predatory Nature, while Selkirk is referred to as a nobleman. The Victorian reader, brought up in a social hierarchy which elevates the aristocracy well above wild beasts, needs no other clue to the interpretation of the discourse which follows. The chief says that Selkirk has taken Cree land without conquering its people and that he therefore cannot lay claim to its ownership. Selkirk's defence, however, renders the Indian speechless before the supreme power of the British monarchy:

> "But I shall shew you that from two standpoints, first from my own, and afterwards from yours, it belongs not to you. Firstly, it belongs to our common Sovereign, the King of England. You belong to him; so likewise do the buffalo that graze upon the plains, and the fishes that swim in the rivers. Therefore our great and good Sovereign sayeth unto me, his devoted subject, 'Go you forth into my territories in the North of America, and select there a colony whereon to plant any of my faithful children who choose to go thither.' I have done so. Then, since you hold possession of these plains only by the bounty and sufferance of our good father the King, how can you object to your white brethren coming when they were permitted so to do?" (17)

Selkirk's speech, structured in the form of a logical syllogism, appears to offer proof that he and his settlers have a right to possess the land. He argues that the territory and its inhabitants rightfully belong to the King of England, and that the King has sent him to plant a colony in this outpost of Empire. It follows from these premises that Selkirk and his settlers

have as much right to the Red River land as do the chief and his people. Collins appears to find this argument completely convincing (although he does bolster it by the use of biblical language which suggests that Selkirk's mission is blessed not only by secular authority but by divine authority as well). The speech silences the Indian chiefs who "looked from one to another with some traces of confusion and defeat upon their faces." It does not occur to these men to ask by what authority the King of England was constituted monarch of the western plains. Although they suspect that Selkirk's tongue is as "crooked as the horn of the mountain-goat (17)," they are silenced by the power of the authority that he represents.

Selkirk continues his defence "in the same grave and firm voice" by pointing out that even from their own viewpoint the Cree are not owners of the territory: "The Saulteux, with whom you wage your constant wars, have been upon these plains as long as you. In times of peace you have intermarried with them, and I now find in your wigwams many a squaw obtained from among the villages of your rivals." This argument is as reasonable as a claim that people of Anglo-Saxon ancestry cannot own property in England because they have intermarried with their Norman foes! Collins, however, is so secure in his faith that the superiority of British civilization has given his countrymen a moral right to conquer lesser people that he cannot see the absurdity of his position. His narrator solemnly assures the reader that the chiefs could not deny Selkirk's logic. They accept the Earl's platitude that his people come among the Cree "not as conquerors, but as brothers" (18), and the episode ends with the Indians offering the settlers fish and buffalo steak.

This passage sets the tone for Collins's depiction of native rebellion. He does acknowledge that the Canadian government's cavalier treatment of the Métis people during the transfer of Hudson's Bay Company territory to the new Dominion in 1870 provided just

cause for dissatisfaction (37-8). He also acknowledges that the government "has been most criminally remiss" (137) in its disregard of the Métis land claims that sparked the 1885 rebellion. His considered opinion, however, is that these wrongs do not justify rebellion against the legitimate authority of the nation. Riel is a "wily traitor" and a "cunning deceiver" (38) who takes advantage of Métis dissatisfaction and inflames it for his own advantage. When the narrator compares his behavior with that of the white population, he concludes that the latter exhibit admirable patriotism and good sense in their rejection of armed resistance: "Most of these people were loyal to the heart's core, and were of opinion that the rising had nothing justifiable in it, and regarded it as a criminal and treasonable rebellion." Without pausing to consider that these "good men" had less to gain and far more to lose from a rebellion that jeopardised the security of their lives and property, Collins congratulates them for raising their voices against the "lawlessness" (48) of the rebels.

Collins further privileges the Anglo-Canadian position by his appeal to authority, by his use of pictures and casualty lists to create fear and outrage and by his use of half-truths and distorted information. Although The Rebel Chief is a novel, Collins employs footnotes and references to "authorities" to create an illusion of historical accuracy. On the second page of the novel, for example, he cites Edward Jack of New Brunswick "who is well informed on all Canadian matters" as the source of his information on Riel's background, and includes a passage which he says he translated from M. Tassé's book "on Canadians in the North West" (6). Apparently this veneer of "facts" was successful in convincing early readers of the authenticity of Collins' history. In a footnote to Annette The Metis Spy Collins says that his story "has been quoted as history" (142) even though, as he himself admits, there is "not one word of truth" in his account of the Marie-Scott-Riel triangle. His

explanation for misleading his readers is sufficiently interesting to justify quoting in full:

> I never intended that the work in question should be taken as history; and I should have made that point clear in an introduction, bearing my name, but that I was unwilling to take responsibility for the literary slovenliness, which was unavoidable through my haste in writing, and through Mr. D. A. Rose's hurry in publishing, the work. It occupied me only seventeen days; and I did not see my proofs. (143)

A careful reader can use this "literary slovenliness" to deconstruct Collins's text on the basis of the discrepancies between his fictituous account of Riel's behavior and the newspaper summaries of Riel's trial and execution that he appends to the novel. In a number of instances evidence given at the trial contradicts information given in the text. Collins's terse account of Riel's return to western Canada, for example, implies that the Métis leader initiated his involvement in the early stages of the Rebellion. The narrator says that Riel "left off his wooing for a little while, and returned to the old theatre of his crimes" (135). Collins's abstract of the Toronto Globe trial account, however, creates a very different impression. Charles Nolin, a witness hostile to Riel, testifies that in 1884 he participated in a movement to bring Riel back to Canada from Montana. The participants "believed Riel would be of advantage in obtaining redress of the grievances. . . . Delegates were sent to invite Riel to come, and he came with his wife and family" (182). This evidence is confirmed, on the following day, by Father Andre, Superior of the Oblate Fathers in the district of Carlton (184). Collins's account creates an image of an evil libertine rubbing his hands in glee as he returns to the scene of his dark deeds. The newpaper summary, on the other hand, suggests that Riel is a respectable family man and a skilled leader who is **invited**

to return to Canada for the public good. There is a similar discrepancy between Collins's portrayal of Riel as a blend of lecherous villain and savage beast and the image of the calm, courteous and courageous statesman that emerges from the newspaper abstracts[4]. Since all literature and written history is subjective, Collins is certainly not the only writer to manipulate reader response by the use of half-truths, ommisions and the distortion of historical material[5]. He is, however, unique among the writers of western Canadian wilderness romances in the audacity with which he constructs his own version of history. He further embellishes his account of the British-Canadian quest to save civilization by the use of inflammatory pictures, such as the illustrations of an Indian attack on white settlers (111) and a rebel attack on Major Boulton's scouts (171), and by his inclusion of a sympathy-generating list of white men killed and wounded in the Rebellion (172-5). Collins's literary techniques privilege white civilization by condemning Indian and Métis efforts to save their traditional way of life. He does not so much **convince** his readers of the superior merits of

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[4]John Donkin, in his recollections of his years in the North West Mounted Police between 1884 and 1888, gives a similarly contradictory report of Riel's behavior. Although his account of the Rebellion is critical of its wicked leadership and savage participants, Donkin's personal interaction with Riel during the time when he was his prison guard in Regina emphasizes the prisoner's courtesy, deference, gentleness and calm dignity (183-93). Collins and Donkin both have trouble reconciling their image of Riel as a bloodthirsty savage with the well-spoken, well-educated man who led the Rebellion.

[5]John Mackie's account of the 1885 resistance in The Rising of the Red Man: A Romance of the Louis Riel Rebellion (1904) is almost equally creative in its use of fictitious events to empower the cause of European civilization. Mackie, a British writer who served in the North West Mounted Police from 1888 to 1893, creates a cast of white civilians who, assisted by Métis allies and the Mounted Police, slaughter dozens of rebels during a series of hair-raising adventures.

Kate Simpson Hayes's sentimental romance "The Light of Other Days: A Story of the Rebellion and After" (in Prairie Pot-Pourri, 1895) makes similar use of fictitious incidents and characters in her account of the undeclared war between demonic savages and the brave white defenders of home and country.

the Anglo-Canadian cause as he does instill in them fear and loathing of the bestial "other."

Collins's association of aboriginal culture with the savagery and disorder of wild Nature serves to invalidate the former in the eyes of immigrants already made uneasy by a harsh and unfamiliar landscape. Although he writes approvingly of the sweet-scented flowers that blanket the plains, he depicts both the buffalo and First Nations people as rivals to European interests in the West. Wild Nature, like the enemy rebels, must be conquered and tamed in order for settlers to enjoy a life of peace and prosperity in their new homeland.

The imagery in The Rebel Chief suggests that it is not so much Nature as it is unruly Nature that poses a threat to agricultural development. Early in the novel Collins uses the language of sexual seduction to describe the beauty of the fertile land that Lord Selkirk encounters when he arrives in the Red River area. The prairie is "burning with the blooms" of a hundred varieties of flowers that seduce Selkirk with their sweet scent. The tiger rose "like some savage queen of beauty . . . breathe[s] her sultry balm in his face". Although the wild rose is "shy" and stands aloof, "shedding its scent with delicate reserve," the other flowers are less discriminating in the bestowal of their favours and run "riot" through the grassland, "surfeit[ing] his nostrils with their sweets." Clumps of poplars and white oak, "prim, like virgins without suitors," stand guard over all this richness, but when the wind blows over the plain they bow their heads "as if saluting the stranger who came to found a colony in the wilderness of which they were sentinels" (12). Non-animal Nature, Collins suggests, is like a woman, willing if not eager to surrender herself to the conqueror! Compliant and easily subdued, she poses no threat to his dominance of the "new" land.

Collins's description of a herd of buffalo, on the other hand, emphasizes the threat that untamed Nature poses to decent, God-fearing folk. By juxtaposing a description of the

trees and flowers with his description of the buffalo (who appear out of nowhere and have nothing to do with the plot of the novel), the author invites the reader to make a comparision between "good" tame Nature and "bad" untamed Nature. The buffalo are fierce, devilish brutes who, "moving along like some destroying tempest with ten thousand devils at its core," present a diabolical spectacle:

> Then the tremendous mass, headed by maddened bulls, with blazing eyes and foaming nostrils, drove onward toward the south, like an unchained hurricane. Some of the terrified beasts ran against the trees, crushing horns and skull, and fell prone upon the plain, to be trampled into jelly by the hundreds of thousands in the rear. . . . Hell itself let loose could present no such spectacle as this myriad mass of brute life sweeping over the lonely plain under the wan, elfin light of the new-risen moon. Clouds of steam, wreathing itself into spectral shapes of sullen aspect, rose from the dusky, writhing mass, and the flaming of more than ten thousand eyeballs in the gloom presented a picture more terrible than ever came into the imagination of the writer of the Inferno. (13-14)

Collins's use of images of madness, natural disasters and hell emphasizes the danger of untamed Nature and suggests that it will destroy us, and itself, if we (the white settlers) do not subdue it. This textual message is reinforced by an accompanying illustration of a buffalo hunt--two fierce-looking buffalos are about to charge an Indian hunter who is pinned to the ground by his dead horse (15). Collins's picture of the havoc left in the buffalo's wake --crushed herbage, broken sod, "rank, matted masses of wild pease," the "feverish exhalations" of dying flowers, the "disagreeable and oppressive" (14) smell of decaying

vegetation--further reinforces the view that Nature must be conquered if the prairies are to be made safe for European habitation[6].

The particular importance of the buffalo's symbolic role in the wilderness romance can be accounted for by its importance to the traditional native economy. Frank Roe notes that it affected the indigenous North American culture perhaps "more vitally" (4) than any other single species in its native environment in any other part of the world. Along with other fur-bearing animals buffalo were the "underpinnings" (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 102) of freedom for Indian and Métis people, who depended on them for food, shelter, clothing, bedding, tools and trade goods. It is no accident that the disappearance of buffalo herds from the plains by the end of the 1870s coincided with the beginning of agricultural settlement west of Red River and with the disappearance of the traditional Indian way of life. In order for the settlers to take possession of the "new" land, they first had to slaughter the buffalo and vanquish the Indians. In his study of the impact of what he calls "ecological imperialism," Alfred Crosby notes that the native ecosystem of the Great Plains successfully resisted the introduction of European plant and animal species as long as the buffalo remained monarch of the prairies. "The invaders made little progress," he says, "until the dominant creature of their biota arrived in force, with rifle" (291). With the eradication of the buffalo, and of the Indians who depended upon them for sustenance, the way was clear for the European settlement of the West.

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[6] Although the buffalo in Bertrand Sinclair's Raw Gold (1907) are not hostile, evil beasts, they share with Collins's malevolent herd the role of obstacle to the achievement of a social quest. Sinclair's buffalo are "stolid obstructions" (252) in the hero's pursuit of fleeing villains; they are the "enemy" in a "war for the open road" (256) which must be won in order to bring criminals to justice and thus make the West safe for settlement. Like wild Nature and savage Indian, they represent a chaotic force which civilization must conquer.

It is not only Nature, however, that must be conquered; by associating Indians with predatory animals Collins depicts them as a threat that must be suppressed if settlement is to proceed. In order to enlist sympathy for the white settlers, he dehumanizes their Indian and Métis opponents by his use of animal similies and metaphors. Riel, for example, is continually compared to a "wild beast" or a "foul beast." In a passage describing the events of 1870 that preceded the 1885 rebellion, Collins makes explicit the connection between his use of animal imagery and his privileging of the values of civilization. Most of the white population in the Red River area, his narrator says, are loyal to the government in Ottawa and regard rebellion as an act of treason. When these people speak against Riel's plans, however, Riel considers vengeance on them, and glares with "wolfish eyes upon the good men who raised their voices against lawlessness . . ." (48). The language of this passage assigns the white men the role of rational, thoughtful beings who are on the side of civilization and order. Riel, on the other hand, is associated with lawlessness, vengeance and predatory Nature. He is a wild man beyond the pale of decent human society.

By emphasizing the savage **otherness** of Riel and his adherents, Collins erodes the credibility of their resistance to government policies in the North West[7]. Imprisoned by the narrow Eurocentricism of his worldview, he attempts to destroy that which he sees as

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[7]Mackie's description of Indians dancing around burning buildings during the looting of Battleford makes similar use of animal imagery: "Some of the warriors . . . had donned uncanny masks that took the shape of buffalo and moose heads, with shaggy manes, horns and antlers, and, horror of horrors, some of them . . . showed themselves to be possessed of tails that made them look like capering demons" (The Rising of the Red Man 47). Wild Nature and wild savages both represent an evil force that threatens civilization. Indeed, the heroine's encounter with a hungry bear and two disgruntled Métis suggests that there is little basis for choice between them. Perched on the roof of a building that divided her antagonists, Dorothy is "almost at a loss to determine which enemy [is] the more to be dreaded" (113).

different and threatening. The colonist, as Todorov notes, has always viewed the colonized either as human beings like himself, which leads him to project his own values on the other, or as different--and therefore inferior--to himself. "What is denied," he says, "is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself" (42). The egocentric identification of our own values with values in general, "of our **I** with the universe" (43) narrows our conception of legitimate humanity and makes it possible for writers like Collins to deny the validity of First Nations cultures. Although writers like R. M. Ballantyne and Egerton Ryerson Young viewed Indians as incipient Christians whose spiritual conversion would turn them into copper-coloured versions of their European brethren, native people in Collins's novels are emphatically **not** like us. They represent the dark view of "other" as someone belonging to a different and **inferior** culture associated with the disorder and savagery of wildness.

Collins further discredits the Métis cause by associating its leader with the greedy, grasping villains of melodrama. Indeed, he goes to considerable length to establish Riel's villainy by fabricating a story about the Métis leader's unsuccessful attempt to seduce the young woman who loves Thomas Scott[8]. He assures his readers that this story "will shed a new light upon the darkest deed of the dark career of the miscreant Rebel" (48). What it sheds light on, however, is Collins's desperate need to discredit Riel. The author justly assumes that no reader will take seriously the political grievances of a man who mutters curses on his rival in love and who speaks with the voice of a stage villain: "'[Marie] shall be

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[8]The narrator points out that Riel continues his immoral behavior after the death of Marie. In a footnote that would result in slander charges to a journalist today, he observes that it "is stated upon certain authority, how good I don't know, that the brave M. Riel rejoices in the possession of three wives" (131).

mine!' he hissed [to Scott], 'when your corpse lies mouldering in a dishonoured traitor's grave'" (117). The story has nothing to do with the rightness or wrongness of Métis rebellion; it is designed primarily to instill in the reader repugnance towards this man who violates the Victorian code of domestic and sexual conduct. By associating their cause with **moral** villainy, Collins discredits the **political** resistance of Métis people to the destruction of their traditional way of life.

Although his account of the 1885 uprisings was written almost 30 years after their suppression by Canadian forces, Ralph Connor shares with Collins an abhorrence of the Indian and Métis resistances that briefly threatened British prosperity in the West[9]. Corporal Cameron and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail make a strong connection between the economic future of the prairies and the status of discontented indigenous people. His narrator's commentary on the aftermath of the Rebellion, indeed, indicates that economic development hinged upon eradication of the threat to life and property posed by the rebels: "The Western ranches were rejoicing in a sense of vast relief from the terrible pall that like a death-cloud had been hanging over them for six months and all Western Canada was thrilling with the expectation of a new era of prosperity consequent upon its being discovered by the big world outside" (Patrol 347). It was not only war, however, that threatened the prosperity of the West. Equally threatening was the existence of a wilderness culture incompatible with civilization. Prairie historian T. D. Regehr, summarizing the thinking of George Stanley in The Birth of Western Canada, notes that the Riel rebellions were not primarily racial or

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[9]Modern historians suggest that leading chiefs "were attempting to unite their followers to force better treatment from the government in Ottawa" (Daniel Francis 65), but that there was no threat of a general Indian rising in 1885.

religious conflicts but the inevitable outcome of the clash between a primitive society and a civilization which required its destruction: "There was no place in the new settled and civilized way of life for the Indians and Metis, and protest was a natural and perhaps inevitable response" (94). Connor recognized that discovery by "the big world outside" was essential to provide the labour and capital required for economic development. European immigration, however, resulted in the conversion of wild spaces to farms, cities and other human settlements that were incompatible with the semi-nomadic life of a hunting and gathering culture. Connor's response to this dilemma, sympathetic though it is to a people displaced by agricultural settlement, privileges civilization above wildness.

Connor's novels fail to recognize, finally, that injustice to First Nations people was an inevitable part of Western economic "progress." The narrator acknowledges that competition caused by the "incoming tide of humanity, hungry for land" (Cameron 399) threatened the security of Métis tenure and that the disappearance of the buffalo caused poverty and near-starvation for the Indians. Rendered desperate by their present discontents and by their anxiety for the future, these people "offered fertile soil for the seeds of rebellion" (Cameron 400). Connor lays most of the blame for their plight on the indifference and stupidity of the Dominion government, which failed to respond to appeals for assistance. What he does not fully acknowledge, however, is the basic incompatibility of wildness and civilization. Although he pities the poor Indian for his loss of freedom, he celebrates the prosperity of the settler who benefits from the Indian's loss. Connor's ambivalence in the face of this paradox causes him some uneasiness, yet in the end he unequivocally supports the suppression of native rebellion.

At the heart of Connor's dilemma is a struggle between his desire for justice and fair

play and his desire for order. He recognizes that the Indians and Métis have suffered loss in their exchanges with white civilization, but his commitment to economic progress and Western civilization obliges him to defend the forces which make that progress and civilization possible. In a passage which illustrates the contradictions within this point of view, Commisioner Irvine acknowledges both the magnitude of the Indians' loss and the superior power of the British Empire:

> "Twenty years ago, no, fifteen years ago, less than fifteen years ago, these Indians whom we have been holding in our hand so quietly were roaming these plains, living like lords on the buffalo and fighting like fiends with each other, free from all control. Little wonder if, now feeling the pinch of famine, fretting under the monotony of pastoral life, and being incited to war by the hot-blooded half-breeds, they should break out in rebellion. And what is there to hold them back? Just this, a feeling that they have been justly treated, fairly and justly dealt with by the Government, and a wholesome respect for Her Majesty's North West Mounted Police. . . ." (Patrol 256-7)

If, in fact, the Indians have been fairly treated by the Government, why are they now "feeling the pinch of famine" and suffering the boredom and indignity of Reserve life? Although Connor tries, simultaneously, to empathize with the Indians and to justify the behavior of their oppressors, his argument breaks down when he talks about justice. That free men who have lived "like lords" on the open plains should peacefully submit to confinement and near-starvation out of gratitude to the government is highly unlikely. More convincing is Connor's second explanation for their submission--their "wholesome respect" for the power of Her Majesty's North West Mounted Police.

In his treatment of the central episode in The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail, Connor privileges the position of his white protagonist by enlisting the reader's sympathies on the side of law and order. Although the North West Mounted Police recognize that the Indians and Métis have genuine grievances, their job is to suppress rebellion. They must, therefore, control the restless young men who are "getting out of hand" (25) and chafing under the restrictions on their freedom. Connor's description of Cameron's encounter with the would-be Indian rebels works to justify this control. By virtually silencing the eloquent Sioux leader while giving Cameron the gift of rational, persuasive speech, Connor empowers the civilized voice of order and reason.

Having learned that Copperhead is preaching rebellion to the western Indians, Cameron and his half-breed interpreter Jerry track their foes to a clandestine meeting in the Sun Dance Canyon. They arrive just in time to hear the Sioux leader address the gathering. The narrator tells us that Copperhead holds his audience spellbound as he speaks to them of the glory of the days when they were lords of wood and plain. The "mystic magic power" of his voice and the "exalted emotion" of his soul are so intense that even Cameron, though he does not understand the words, feels himself "irresistibly borne along the torrent of the flowing words" (191). What the reader hears, however, is Jerry's terse version of this verbal magic:

> "He say Indian long tam' 'go have all country when his fadder small boy. Dem day good hunting--plenty beaver, mink, moose, buffalo like leaf on tree, plenty hit (eat), warm wigwam, Indian no seeck, notting wrong. Dem day Indian lak' bear 'fraid notting. Good tam', happy, hunt deer, keel buffalo, hit all day." (190)

Although these words may move the reader with pity, they do not sweep his or her soul "with surging tides of passion" (191) as, the narrator tells us, do Copperhead's words. Jerry's prosaic account of the past is couched in broken English that signifies his low status in a society where powerful men speak the language of their British public school background. Nor does the reader hear the speech which follows Copperhead's, but only the narrator's summary and Jerry's critical dismissal of its call for rebellion: "Oh he beeg damfool! . . . . He tell 'bout beeg meeting, beeg man Louis Riel mak' beeg noise. Bah! Beeg damfool!" (192). The Métis speaker talks about restoring the old Indian way of life when a new government is set up after the rebellion. Cameron, speaking for the author, is horrified by this "savage nonsense" (193) because he realizes that the Métis dream would destroy the Anglo-Canadian dream of agricultural settlement and economic prosperity. Rebellion would unleash the savage spirit of the red man, "long subdued by those powers that represented the civilization of the white man" (194), and would make him once again a threat to Western progress. The Indians, however, listen to the rebels with an enthusiasm dampened only by thoughts of the North West Mounted Police. And the North West Mounted Police prove a force to be reckoned with, for behind them is the power of the British Empire.

In his pivotal speech to the Indians, Cameron both illustrates and expresses the power which enables a handful of the "Queen's cowboys" to control a fierce, proud people scattered across an area larger than western Europe. To start with, Connor privileges the North West Mounted Police position by allowing Cameron to address the reader. We do not hear Jerry's interpretation or the narrator's summary, as we do with the speeches of Copperhead and the unnamed Métis, but the persuasive text of the hero's own words. Cameron's voice is authoritative, calm and rational. It inspires the hypothetical reader--someone who shares

Connor's belief in the value of Western civilization--with confidence. The reader is therefore predisposed to accept the validity of Cameron's argument that the Indians do not have just cause to engage in armed rebellion. This argument has three parts. Cameron first establishes that the Government is not to blame for the Indians' grievances. The Government, he says, is "the Indian's best friend" and the Police are "the Government's ears and eyes and hands . . . ready always to help the Indians, to protect them from fraud, to keep away the whiskey-peddlers, to be to them as friends and brothers" (205). When Running Stream points out that Government assistance to the Indians has not kept them from going hungry, Cameron's reply suggests that the Indians themselves are at fault: "But how can my brother expect the Government to care for his people if the Indians break the law?" (204). Although the real reason for his visit to the Indian camp is to arrest Copperhead and thus prevent him from instigating an uprising, Cameron gladly seizes upon the pretext of looking for cattle rustlers as an excuse. His discovery of the cattle skins and heads is "useful" (200) because it enables him to put the Indians "on the defensive" (201). Unwilling to accept hunger, or a cultural tradition based upon common ownership of resources, as an excuse for theft, Cameron instead uses theft as an excuse for Government inaction and for greater Police control of native people. Responding to Copperhead's accusation that white men have taken the Indian's hunting ground and driven away the buffalo, he insists that the Government "bought the land by treaty" and that the buffalo have been driven across the border by the "hungry thieving Sioux" (205). At no point in his speech does he acknowledge the legitimacy of Indian grievances. Instead, he privileges the Government and Police position by laying all the blame on the Indians.

In the second and third parts of his argument Cameron further disempowers native

people by attacking the integrity of their leaders and by pointing out the superior strength of the white man. Copperhead is a "lying snake" (205) and Riel is a foolish man, a traitor, a liar and a coward. Both men, Cameron suggests, will lead the poor Indians into a war that will bring them ruin:

> "And now . . . this vain and foolish Frenchman seeks again to lead you astray, to lead you into war that will bring ruin to you and to your children; and this lying snake from your ancient enemies, the Sioux, thinking you are foolish children, seeks to make you fight against the great White Mother across the seas. He has been talking like a babbling old man, from whom the years have taken wisdom, when he says that the half-breeds and Indians can drive the white man from these plains. Has he told you how many are the children of the white Mother, how many are the soldiers in her army? Listen to me, and look!" (206)

Cameron proceeds to use tree branches to represent the relative strength of the Indian and white forces, then triumphantly concludes that the Indians would be fools to fight against men more than fifty times as strong as themselves. In this novel use of statistics he simultaneously demonstrates the power of Western logic to influence native opinion and illustrates the might of the British Empire. Against forces such as these, what hope can the Indians have in rebellion?

Connor further disempowers aboriginal people by comparing them to wild beasts imprisoned or destroyed by human conquerors. Copperhead is a wily old snake who, when he is finally captured, "fret[s] his life out like an eagle in a cage" (346). Although his son is a "good" Indian who helps white people, he too is described initially as akin to untamed

Nature. Early in the novel Mandy and Cameron find the boy, half-starved, with his foot caught in a wolf-trap. Mandy cleans and bandages his ankle, then feeds him. Connor's description of his attack on the food suggests his brotherhood to the wolf in whose trap he was caught:

> Mandy caught the wolf-like look in his eyes as they fell upon the food. . . . The Indian seized the bread, and, noting that he was unobserved, tore it apart like a dog and ate ravenously, the fish likewise, ripping the flesh off the bones and devouring it like some wild beast. . . .
>
> . . . as he watched her there gleamed in his eyes that dumb animal look of gratitude. (48-9)

The interesting thing about this description, however, is what happens immediately after the boy is fed. He and Mandy are threatened by a real wolf, which the boy kills. Since the boy has clearly been identified with the wolf, the episode has important symbolic implications which help to explain why he later allies himself with the white men against his father. The boy has killed the wolf in him and no longer identifies with his wild people. Instead, he becomes part of that force which seeks to eradicate wildness in order to impose on it the controlling pattern of civilization.

The demonized other, by showing us what we are not, helps to differentiate us from wild Nature and from the wild men who inhabit it. The existence of this other thus helps us establish our own identities and serves as evidence of "the rightness of established power" (Selden re Greenblatt's thought, 107). Knowledge that the Indian and Métis rebels are little better than animals (according to the anthropocentric worldview of the dominant British culture) serves to establish the moral superiority of the white people who oppose their

"lawlessness." As historian Hayden White notes, the concept of wildness not only defines a particular state of being, but also confirms the value of its opposing state of civilization (Tropics of Discourse 151). When wildness is associated with madness and evil (as Collins's description of the buffalo suggests it is), then its antithesis is associated with the positive qualities of sanity and goodness. Although the Romantics held an Arcadian view of Nature and glorified the primitive person as someone uncorrupted by civilization (White 171), during the nineteenth century the noble savage came to be regarded "less as an ideal than as an example of **arrested** humanity, as that part of the species which had failed to raise itself above dependency on nature . . . as that from which civilized man, thanks to science, industry, Christianity, and racial excellence, had finally (and definitively) raised himself" (White 178). The "wild man" thus became, in Victorian eyes, an inferior being whose disappearance from the plains of North America was a cause for celebration rather than lament. Connor's literary treatment of First Nations people reflects that cultural legacy.

Connor's treatment of his white protagonists, on the other hand, privileges Anglo-Canadian civilization by giving its adherents the language and social behavior of British gentlemen. His description of the outlaw Dick Raven, in particular, illustrates the important connection between social status and the patriotic support of Empire. Raven is a handsome, dashing fellow "with that unmistakable something in his bearing that suggested the breeding of a gentleman" (Patrol 148). He is also an outlaw who smuggles whiskey to the Indians and who is partly responsible for the murder of two Stonies. Cameron vows to bring Raven and his partner Little Thunder to justice, but Raven's "cheerful face, his endless tales, and his invincible good humour" (Cameron 364) take the edge off his anger at this man who callously flouts the laws of his country. Little Thunder, however, is not a gentleman. His

repulsive face and generally "blood-thirsty" (Cameron 332) appearance make Cameron decide that this "ugly devil at least shall swing!" (Cameron 367). Then Little Thunder becomes involved in plans for an Indian uprising and Raven, gentleman that he is, announces his firm allegiance to the Empire: ". . . I am for the Queen, God bless her!" Cameron and Inspector Dickson listen approvingly:

> "By Jove!" exclaimed Cameron. "Isn't that great?"
>
> "Very fine, indeed," said the Inspector softly. (Cameron 418)

There is no doubt that Connor was strongly opposed both to murder and to smuggling whiskey to the Indians. Raven's criminal actions, however, are balanced by his courteous speech and fine manner. The outlaw's subsequent behavior--his disclosure to the police of Little Thunder's strategy for rebellion, his heroic rescue of Cameron's sister and his final gallant behavior when he stops the cattle raid--entitles him to Cameron's words of praise: "You are a true man, if God ever made one . . ." (Patrol 296). Raven's death on behalf of his country redeems him in the eyes of God and man, and suggests that even a murderer can find forgiveness if he is a patriot and a gentlemen[10]. The dying man's last words leave no doubt that, in the author's mind, the outlaw has paid his dues:

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[10]Connor's treatment of the gentleman outlaw whose gallantry and patriotism earn him a deathbed forgiveness is similar to Bertrand Sinclair's earlier treatment (in Raw Gold) of renegade NWMP Seargeant Goodell who, although guilty of murder and robbery, dies in an attempt to protect a white woman from dishonour. Goodell faces death bravely with an old English Royalist song on his lips:

> Sing heigh, sing ho, for the cavalier!
> Sing heigh, sing ho, for the Crown.
> Gentlemen all, turn out, turn out;
> We'll keep these Roundheads down!

The narrator concludes that the Seargeant's effort to save Lyn Rowan will "more than wipe out the black score against him when the Book of Life is balanced" (249). Like Raven, Goodell redeems himself by his adherence to a gentleman's code of chivalry and patriotism.

> "And say to the Superintendent that I was on the straight with him, with you all, with my country in this rebellion business. . . . I have run some cattle in my time, but you know, Cameron, a fellow who has worn the uniform could not mix in with these beastly breeds against the Queen, God bless her!" (Patrol 296-7)

Raven's words call into question the concept of the pioneer West as a country in which a man's worth was judged solely by his own merit. Cameron proudly tells his sister, newly arrived from the "old country," that prairie people "are all the same socially" (Patrol 166), and the narrator insists that everyone "was given his fair opportunity to show his stuff and according to his showing was his place in the community" (Patrol 167). Raven, it is true, proves his courage and his worth by his gallant defence of his country, but Connor is less than honest when he implies that everyone is given Raven's opportunity. The author's treatment of two other brave men suggests not only that some heroes are more equal than others, but also that the criteria for superior heroic worth involve adherence to the standards of upper class British civilization. Copperhead's son brings Cameron important news of Indian plans for a cattle raid and general uprising, and later frees Cameron and his interpreter from their captivity, yet Connor does not so much as grace his Indian "hero" with the dignity of a name. Even Cameron's words of praise are faint in their approbation: "'Not a bad sort,' he said to himself. . . . Pretty tough thing for him to come here and give away his dad's scheme like that-and I bet you he is keen on it himself too'" (281). Smith, the clergyman-turned-hired man, gets equally casual treatment although he, too, proves his worth by helping fight fire when Copperhead burns Cameron's house, by organizing a raising bee for a new one and by helping Mandy when Cameron is away preventing an Indian war. No one ever

says that Smith is not a good fellow, but people certainly damn him with faint praise. That the outlaw Raven is more highly valued than the staid and respectable Smith is evident in the reaction of various characters when they mistakenly believe that Cameron's sister is in love with him. Cameron's friend Martin cannot understand her preference: "Raven was a fine chap and I don't mind losing her heart to him-- but really this is too much" (349). And although Mandy rebukes him, justly pointing out that Smith is a kind and honourable man, she too is angry and disgusted by Moira's behavior: "If it had been Raven, Moira, I could have stood it" (352). There really is nothing wrong with Smith, but he lacks Raven's bold gallantry and he is not a gentleman. He is therefore unworthy to take his place beside the true heroes who suppress rebellion.

Connor and Collins recognized that missionaries and police forces alone could not make the West safe for settlement. They needed the support of public opinion educated to view rebellion as a threat to the sacred principle of law and order. In their novels Louis Riel the Rebel Chief, Corporal Cameron and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail both writers worked to invalidate armed resistance by equating the forces of rebellion with unruly Nature and with errant villainy. They privileged the white forces that controlled dissent by equating them with moral virtue and upper class gallantry. In the process they established, once again, the superiority of European civilization to the disorder and savagery that constituted wild Nature.

Chapter Six

Validating the Social Order of the "Old" World: Power and the Patriarchal Hierarchy in Spirit-of-Iron.

> As pioneers preparing for the advance of civilization, the Mounted Police undertake to suffer discomfort and to perform duties of unexampled difficulty, without the performance of which the new provinces of the western plains must be, as they were before the white men came--a howling wilderness.
> - H. R. A. Pocock, "A Night Halt" in Tales of Western Life, Lake Superior and the Canadian Prairie, 1888[1]

> Civilized Man says: I am self, I am Master, all the rest is other-- outside, below, underneath, subservient. I own, I use, I explore, I exploit, I control. What I do is what matters. What I want is what matter is for. I am that I am, and the rest is women and the wilderness. . . .
> - Ursula K. LeGuin, "Women/Wilderness," 1989[2]

Perhaps because the North West Mounted Police played a colourful and dramatic role in the formation of prairie society, the Mounted Police novel quickly became an important form of the wilderness romance. Like the wilderness romance in general it privileges

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[1]p. 77.

[2]p. 45.

civilization above wildness by endorsing the ideology of the dominant British culture. More specifically, the Mounted Police romance validates an "old" world patriarchal hierarchy, albeit one in which privilege is based upon both physical strength and adherence to the values of Empire. Power accrues, in these novels, not to men whose social status alone entitles them to high rank and privilege, but to those whose fists and nerve and endurance enable them to enforce their will. Under the guise of maintaining necessary law and order, a small group of men at the top of the social pyramid control the direction of Western society. Exercising power **over** women, Nature and those men below them in the social scale, they impose upon a wilderness the laws and customs of European civilization. Writers like Harwood Steele, in Spirit-of-Iron (1923), proudly endorsed this social system which enabled settlers to convert an unproductive wilderness into a prosperous outpost of the British Empire. Critical analysis of Steele's novel, however, reveals the negative impact of patriarchal hierarchy. It suggests that the obsessive need to control and dominate Nature has its roots in the androcratic[3] tradition which influenced the social and economic development of the West.

Read as a story in which a deserving young man earns power and honour, Spirit-of-Iron is a fable which illustrates the road to success in a patriarchal society. Hector Adair[4], an Ontario boy whose expectations of a military career are terminated by the death of his father, joins the ranks of the North West Mounted Police in 1874. His quest is twofold. On the

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[3]Eisler (105) points out that this term has its roots in the Greek words **andros**, or "man," and **kratos**, or "ruled."

I use the words "androcracy" and "patriarchy" interchangeably in my text.

[4]Adair may well be based on the author's own father, Sam Steele, who reached the rank of Superintendent in the North West Mounted Police.

personal level he must win the hand of the lovely Frances Edginton by earning a commission and by proving his moral worth. On the social level, as a representative of the North West Mounted Police, he must use his physical strength and his position of authority to institute and uphold the law on the frontier of civilization. Hector captures the dangerous whiskey smuggler "Red-hot" Dan, arrests Wild Horse for murder, supppresses enemy rebels in the North West Rebellion, prevents the overthrow of legitimate government in the British Columbia interior and engages in other deeds of valour. As a reward for his stern adherence to duty, he earns both promotion and the right to marry Frances. Hector's masculine body and the unseen force behind the scarlet that he wears enable him to complete his dual quest; they grant him authority and power in the "new" land of the West.

This patriarchal power was instrumental in transforming the sparsely-populated prairies into a prosperous civilization. Steele's dedication of his novel to the original members of the North West Mounted Police who served as "advance scouts of the army of Western Canadian civilization" (v) emphasizes the connection between the administration of British law and the conversion of wilderness into a promised land. The narrator's tone is approving as he notes the changes which occurred during the first years of North West Mounted Police rule:

> Today the iron road, laden with the traffic of a continent, gleams where their wagons rolled. Prosperous farms rise everywhere on the expanse which to them was only an Indian hunting-ground. Young towns stand where they pitched their lonely tents. Proud cities blaze and thunder where they built their lonely forts and in peace and ease a People reap the harvest sown by them in peril and privation. (28)

That prosperous farms, towns and cities stand on land which was "only an Indian hunting-ground" is clearly cause for celebration in the author's eyes. Equally evident is the note of triumph in his observation that a "People" (with a capital P) will "reap the harvest" of the policeman's hard-won nation building. No forebodings about the future social and ecological costs of this development trouble Steele's tribute to the early North West Mounted Police. Indeed, these heroic men are so successful in creating the law and order that are necessary for settlement that by the mid-1890s the prairies stand poised on the brink of a glorious future: "A few years more and the plains would be fenced and agleam with acres and acres of wheat, the Territories would leap to Provinces and Western Canada would take her place as a great power in the land, providing those twin necessities, bread and meat, to the whole wide world" (254). This vision of the West, already made popular by the authors of homesteading romances and immigration propaganda, portrays the emerging prairie provinces as a source of wealth for settlers and a source of raw materials for the rest of the world. As a representative of the Queen (and, therefore, of the established order), Hector devotes himself to "the furtherance of [those] changes" (254) which will transform the prairies from a wilderness dominated by Nature to a "great power" in which man exercises dominion over the natural world. No less than the missionary or the railroad builder, he prepares the way for European settlement and thus helps to change the physical and cultural face of the Canadian prairies. That there is a connection between the nature of this change and the nature of patriarchy is the central premise of this chapter.

Hector's authority derives from a strong masculine body and from an administrative position that gives him power over those beneath him in the social hierarchy. A key player in what Riane Eisler calls a dominator social order, he uses both his rank and his fists as

agents of political control. Eisler says that there are two basic patterns for the organization of society--the dominator model, in which there is a hierarchy of power maintained by force or the threat of force, and the partnership model based upon cooperation for the common good (xix). Although she associates the dominator society with "masculine" values and the partnership model with "feminine" values, Eisler insists that it is not men but a patriarchal social system "in which the power of the Blade is idealized--in which both men and women are taught to equate true masculinity with violence and dominance" (xviii) that is at the root of social problems. A major focus of her study in The Chalice & The Blade: Our History, Our Future is a comparison of the impact of different power structures on society. She notes that the "generative, nurturing, and creative powers of nature" (43) were given highest value in partnership cultures such as that found in ancient Crete, whereas dominator societies were characterized by male dominance, violence and an authoritarian social structure (45). Power in Spirit-of-Iron is based upon this pattern of dominance, of male control over women and Nature and subordinate men.

Steele uses the model of a military hierarchy "so wonderful that no pen on earth can picture it" to establish his criteria for the ideal power base of a "new" society. The army is a "glorious brotherhood" of men who serve the "common cause" of British civilization with a devotion so strong that they will die "without a murmer" for "The Regiment." The officer is the "High Priest" (22) under whom the men serve, fearlessly and loyally and **unquestioningly** obeying orders. The North West Mounted Police, of course, adopted the structure of the military hierarchy for its own chain of command and used it to "maintain the right" in the West. Steele, impressed by this model, uses military imagery to describe the

comparable structure of the railroad hierarchy[5]. His narrator notes that the men who built the railroad-- the surveyors, plate-layers, navvies and engineers--were organized like an army:

> Like an army, they had their officers, their N. C. O.s, their rank and file, their hangers-on and camp-followers. The men who supervised--the construction-bosses, skilled engineers, managers of one thing or another--were the officers; the foremen and master-mechanics were the N. C. O.s; the lesser labourers--mostly called Dagoes--who laid the road-bed, dug ditches, carried sleepers, rails and fish-plates--were the rank and file; while the camp-followers and hangers-on--gamblers, whiskey-smugglers, robbers, cut-throats and lost women--were scum clean through. (106)

Steele does not entirely romanticise this army of workers. His narrator says that the men are undisciplined and unruly, and must be controlled by "the iron rule of its chiefs" and by the "unceasing vigilance" of the Mounted Police. The hierarchical structure of the construction

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[5]Ralph Connor's use of the language of a military campaign in his description of the achievements of a railway surveyor's crew suggests that not only the structure but also the **purpose** of these men bears a remarkable similarity to that of an army. In Corporal Cameron he describes the heroism of men who have successfully fought, and won, a battle with Nature:

> Every chain link in those weary marches was a battle ground, every pillar, every picket stood a monument of victory. McIvor's advance through the foot-hill country to The Gap had been one unbroken succession of fierce fights with Nature's most terrifying forces, a triumphal march of heroes who bore on their faces and on their bodies the scars and laurels of the campaign" (305).

As ecofeminists rightly note, there is a strong resemblance between man's dominance of woman and his fellow man and his dominance of Nature.

crew is effective, however, because under it "the great work marched steadily towards completion" (106). Since this great work is all-important, the railroad hierarchy is more than vindicated[6]. Its existence represents a triumph of social organization. Indeed, the social hierarchy is so important that, near the end of the novel when prominent businessman and Member of Parliament Steven Molyneux is killed, Superintendent Hector Adair decides that "[n]o good purpose would be served" in disclosing that the man "to whom the people had entrusted great power" (357) had misused it in attempting to overthrow his own government. The narrator suggests that Adair's protection of Molyneux's honour is an act of generosity toward the man who had persecuted him--as, indeed, it is. It is also, however, an act that protects the **status quo**. Rather than reveal the corruption within the political hierarchy, and thus destroy public faith in its worth, Hector uses his silence to maintain the power of "legitimate" authority.

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[6]Although Steele's novel is primarily about the Mounted Police, his discussion of the railroad makes an important ideological connection between the functions of these twin agents of civilization. The Police provided the protection to life and property that prospective homesteaders saw as a prerequisite to making the prairies their home, and the railroad provided an essential means of transport for both goods and people. The conclusion to part 2 of Spirit-of-Iron recognizes the complementary nature of their roles in opening the West to agricultural settlement. A hymn in praise of the men--both the railway men and the North West Mounted Police participants in the Rebellion--whose sacrifices contributed to the establishment of a New Order in the West, it glorifies the achievements made possible by a patriarchal hierarchy:

> The epic railway lay completed from sea to sea. Its last spike had been the last nail in the coffin of the Old Order. The dead heroes of the little war, who had made that victory possible, slept peacefully, heedless of the thunder of the vast tide of humanity now bearing down upon the plains for which they died--the tide which was the first wave of the iron-spirited nation to come. (165)

There are no lamentations for the fate of a people broken by this victory, nor is there any consideration of a Natural Order lost to herds of cattle and wheatfields. The construction of the railroad, in the narrator's eyes, is a heroic achievement which makes possible the establishment of European civilization on the prairies.

This authority, manifested most clearly in Hector's role as a North West Mounted Policeman, derives its legitimacy and strength from its connection to British law and the Imperial tradition and from its roots in the vigour of the Canadian pioneer experience. The epigraph of the novel (taken from Chapter V of Book IV), indeed, points out that it is the British connection that has instilled in Hector the "Spirit-of-Iron" which characterizes not only him, but also the entire Force and country:

> "He is a living link with the Empire's great traditions, with the blood of British heroes in his veins . . . the personification of the best type of British officer, whose soul is in his corps, who thinks only of the steep and narrow path of Duty . . . the embodiment, in one individuality, of the entire North-West Mounted Police . . . the embodiment of Western Canada. Out there, they call him by the name the Indians gave him--Manitou-pewabic--a tribute to his personality, for the phrase means 'Spirit-of-Iron.' Surely this is the spirit which has made, not only the man, but the Force to which he belongs and the country which is its environment--Spirit-of-Iron!" (ellipses in text)

This British background of honour and fortitude gives Hector the dedication to duty that propells him to the rank of officer and to public fame as a hero of the North West Rebellion. Hector's father, Colonel Adair, had raised Hector to be "that splendid product, 'an officer and a gentleman'" (16) and to carry on "the fighting traditions of a martial family" (14). Important also, however, is his boyhood in the woods of Upper Canada. Although the pioneer experience had been "rough, crude and half civilized," the wilderness solitudes had given him courage, endurance and self-reliance. Brought up in a harsh environment in which "[m]en were men" and "boys were men in miniature" (14), Hector quickly acquired the

"masculine" strength and toughness that later served as a source of power in the iron-spirited West.

The narrator's commentary on Hector's handling of an angry lynch mob and on his arrest of the dangerous outlaw Whitewash Bill summarizes the importance of both abstract law and personal strength in the administration of justice in this "new" land. Unarmed and with only a handful of men behind him, he persuades the mob to go home and Whitewash Bill to surrender. Although he does not impose his will by the use of naked force, he does have, the narrator notes, three "great forces" on his side:

> . . . the tremendous moral force of the coat he wore, badge, as it was, of the terrible North-West Mounted Police, the Keepers of the Law, the whole corps embodied in one lone individual; the great moral force of absolute fearlessness and determination shown in the teeth of certain destruction; the stupendous moral force of the personality which the Indians dreaded and respected and which the outlaw himself had long known--the personality typified in the name "Spirit-of-Iron." (258)

These forces correspond, essentially, to the two major sources of power that I discuss above--the power of British/Canadian law and the power of "masculine" courage and strength. Hector's upbringing, with its emphasis both upon the Imperial connection and upon self-reliance and endurance, makes him an ideal representative of a Police Force dependent upon these sources of power for its enforcement of the law[7].

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[7]Harrison notes that the Mounted Policeman in fiction by British writers serves the cause of Empire and derives his authority from his social caste ("Selling a Birth-Rite" 3), whereas his counterpart in fiction by American writers is more likely to use his fists in the administration of justice and to make decisions on the basis of personal judgment rather than

Steele's novel clearly illustrates the enormous force behind the peaceful exterior of a nation wedded to the British Empire. Unlike the United States, which was created by an act of revolution against "legitimate" authority, Canada is "an anti-revolutionary nation formed by an act of the British Parliament in the interests of peace, order, and good government" (Harrison, "Selling a Birth-Rite" 5). Understandably, its vision of order is far less likely to include the ideals of freedom, individualism amd egalitarianism which, Harrison says, characterize the American dream. Instead, it endorses a social hierarchy in which order "descends deductively from precepts which are beyond the view and questioning of the individual" ("Selling a Birth-Rite" 6). There is no question that there is real force behind the non-violent exterior of this social order, although it is not the power of a man's fist or a loaded gun. Rather, it is the unseen force of an entire nation and of the Empire of which it is a part. Near the end of Spirit-of-Iron, when Hector is addressing a meeting of would-be revolutionaries, he is heartened by the knowledge that this power is behind him: "He felt--a wonderful feeling--that the strength of all Canada, for whom he was enduring this thing, was behind him, helping him to dominate, trusting him, looking to him--and behind Canada, the

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strict adherence to the law ("Selling a Birth-Rite" 5). The Canadian Mountie occupies a middle ground between these extremes. He serves an abstract ideal of social order rather than the British Empire or his own conception of justice, and depends upon neither the privilege of class nor the power of his fists in the exercise of his duty. Instead, he maintains the law "by moral rather than physical force and by a power which flows out of his selfless devotion to a remote ideal of civilized order" ("Selling a Birth-Rite 4). His power is based not upon the status derived from a public school education or upon brute strength, but upon his position as a representative of a powerful civilization. I will argue, however, that the "masculine" power of a strong body and an iron will plays a remarkably important role in the work of our own writers.

Empire--" (351)[8]. This is not overt, naked power, but it carries a veiled threat of violence which **could** be unleashed. Hector warns the meeting of the repercussions that would follow rebellion--ten thousand troops sent from Ottawa, a substantial body of police equipped with machine-guns and an armed body of a thousand loyal citizens would quickly and forcibly crush revolt. That the revolution does not occur is a tribute not only to the efficacy of the North West Mounted Police, but also to the force **behind** the power of British/Canadian law[9].

It is also a tribute to Hector's personal strength and courage. The endurance and steadiness of purpose instilled in him by his boyhood training and by his conscious adherence to the practice of the Adair family motto, "Strong--Steadfast," enable him to overcome the obstacles which a harsh climate, hostile Indians and murderous whiskey-runners set in his way--and enable him to influence the course of Western history. "Spirit-of-Iron" is an appropriate name for this man who, as a local rancher says, "worships Duty and says his prayers to Discipline" (173)[10]. Although there are costs, the rewards for his

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[8]Connor makes a similar point in Corporal Cameron. A young Mountie subdues an American gunman without resort to violence; behind his naked words, the narrator tells us, "lay the full weight of Great Britain's mighty empire" (308).

[9]In a similar vein, when Hector asks Father Duval to explain to the Indians that joining the North West Rebellion is not in their own best interests, he tells him to "point out the power of the Great White Mother . . . how the flow of troops will continue, thousands and thousands of Shagalasha, until the war is ended at any cost and the leaders of the rebels hanged" (150-1). Behind the moral authority of The North West Mounted Police, representatives of the Queen, is the military power of the Canadian nation and, ultimately, of the British Empire.

[10]Early western Canadian fiction is peopled with dozens of North West Mounted Policemen whose stern devotion to duty gives them heroic stature. None are more noble than Gilbert Parker's Sergeant Fones, who dies in a blizzard after saving from ruin his rival in love. Part of "the great machine of Order" ("The Patrol of the Cypress Hills" in Pierre and His People 6) which upholds the law on the prairies, Fones enjoys the rewards of neither marriage nor officer status--promotion papers making him a lieutenant do not arrive until after his death--but he earns the love and respect of colleague and whiskey smuggler alike.

sternness of spirit are immediate and obvious. Hector's iron will and unfailing devotion to duty earn him rapid advancement in the NWMP hierarchy, and give him the power that accompanies officer status in that body of men. "I hold every man in my division . . . in the hollow of my hand," Hector tells Molyneux. "I can make their lives Heaven or Hell" (204). Because Hector is a just man who genuinely cares about the cause of civilization which he serves, he does not abuse his power--at least, he does not abuse it in terms of a patriarchal and anthropocentric value system. Both the plot and the narrative tone clearly establish that he is the hero of the novel. Steele's treatment of women, however, gives the reader grounds for challenging the patriarchal ideology of the text.

A critical reading of Spirit-of-Iron exposes both the social injustice and the ecological destruction that are an inevitable consequence of patriarchal hierarchy. Although Steele does not intend to reveal flaws in a social system which permitted Western man to turn a wilderness "wasteland" into a prosperous civilization, deconstruction allows the reader to see the weaknesses and inherent inconsistencies in his ideological stance. It discloses the injustice and the social costs that are an intrinsic part of a social paradigm which allows one segment of humanity to dominate women and Nature.

Implicit in an ecofeminist analysis of Spirit-of-Iron is a recognition of the costs of both patriarchal hierarchy and the privileging of "masculine" values. Steele creates a social order in which men like Hector hold power by virtue of masculine strength and official status; although there are threats to their legitimate authority, they are overcome (in the age-old tradition of the romance) by the **superior** power and moral worth of the "good guys." The patriarchal hierarchy is thus vindicated and the "masculine" worldview emerges triumphant and unchallenged. Hidden beneath the conservative ideology of the text,

however, is the radical potential for revealing the dysfunction of a social system that is unjust, vulnerable to abuse of power and intolerant of diversity. Although novelists like Steele do not portray the impact of gender inequality on western Canadian society, those of us writing today, one hundred years after the agricultural settlement of the West, can trace the roots of much present discontent to the oppression of our foremothers who were rendered politically powerless by the patriarchal hierarchy of their day. That there is a connection between their oppression and the oppression of Nature is one of the key points of ecofeminism.

Perhaps because they play the **natural** role of bearing and nurturing the young of their species, women have long been associated with Nature. The image of earth as a nurturing mother is not the product of twentieth-century ecological awareness, but influenced humanity's perception of the land-human relationship even before the beginning of recorded history. A number of cultural historians have pointed to the importance of earth-mother imagery in prehistoric times[11]; other studies have noted the use of female imagery in descriptions of Nature in the artwork and literature of western Europe and the United States[12]. These studies illustrate a strong connection between our perception of earth-as-woman and our treatment of Nature. In the matriarchal, goddess-based religions of prehistory, art historian Elinor Gadon notes, Nature was an integral part of the web of being

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[11]See, for example, Elinor Gadon's The Once & Future Goddess and Riane Eisler's The Chalice & The Blade.

[12]In The Death of Nature Carolyn Merchant discusses the changing role of earth-woman imagery in early modern Europe, and Annette Kolody, in her study of the land-as-woman metaphor, notes that the image of the land as nurturing mother recurs throughout American literature.

that constituted life on earth: "All were responsible to each other and responsible for the ongoing rhythms of life, death, and rebirth--human, women equally with men, animals and plants, rocks and rivers, the planet earth and its atmosphere" (Gadon xii-iii). This egalitarian view of life, Gadon says, was shattered by the advent of a monotheism in which a single male God ruled supreme over the heavens and earth[13]. Although the Goddess was destroyed as a positive cultural symbol, however, her influence in western Europe lingered well into the Middle Ages. Carolyn Merchant, indeed, suggests that the image of earth as woman continued to be powerful until the Scientific Revolution and the market-oriented culture of the early modern era (xx). By the sixteenth century the view of Nature as both nurturing mother and virgin nymph was being supplemented or replaced with her image as destroyer. "The virgin nymph offered peace and serenity," Merchant notes, "the earth mother nurture and fertility, but nature also brought plagues, famines, and tempests" (127). Along with portraits of her earlier beatific role, Nature in literature became a savage, disorderly woman whom man must subdue in order to protect civilization.

A passage from G. B. Lancaster's The Law-Bringers (1913) vividly illustrates the

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[13]Paula Gunn Allen notes the existence of a similarly non-hierarchical view of male-female and human-Nature relationships in traditional North American tribal thought: "The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole" (59). Allen argues that American Indians enjoyed a gynecentric, egalitarian social system prior to Anglo-European colonization (195), and insists that even among the Plains people, long considered the most patriarchal Indians, women had considerable influence; the Sun Dance ritual, for example, takes place within "the secure psychic power-generating and protective 'battery' of the circle of Grandmothers," and is "inextricably interwoven" (205) with female power.

connection between patriarchal hierarchy and the destruction of wildness[14]. One of the love triangles in the novel includes Andree, a wild and beautiful Métis woman, and two members of the North West Mounted Police--Tempest, who loves her, and Dick, whom she loves. Dick knows, however, that no white man could marry Andree because, like a savage beast, she would destroy him. In the passage that follows the narrator muses upon the inexorable laws that keep Andree and Tempest apart and thus maintain white supremacy:

> It was inevitable that [Dick] should break Andree here, because Andree stood for the primitive, the savage; for the primal thing which has to be done away with before the march of progress. She was the Canada of the unformed, the undisciplined, the uncivilised. And, being so, she had to make way for the needs and desires of the white man who peoples the world in the place of the native-born. For always, over the face of the earth, go the white men; fulfilling their destiny; destroying the lesser within or without the law; taking that which they can never replace; but obeying, even as the lesser animal obeys, that great merciless inscrutable Power which has made of the white race rulers, founders, destroyers; the builders-up of new dynasties; the devourers of the old.
>
> Tempest stood for the new dynasty; for the race of the future; for a link in the long chain wherewith the white man buckles the earth to himself. And Andree stood for the old dynasty; the thing which must die; the thing to be trodden hard that the roots of the new-planted tree should stand firm in it.

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[14]G. B. Lancaster is the pseudonym of the British writer Edith Lyttleton, author of romantic adventures stories set in far-flung corners of the Empire.

> This was the law of life. . . . All mankind were governed alike by that law. (294)

Andree, symbol of the wilderness, is a beautiful and seductive woman; even Dick, cynical and "hard-nosed," is tempted by her charms. Literally, in terms of the plot of the novel, she must die because she kills a man; her death restores the social order disrupted by this violation of the law. Symbolically, she must be destroyed in order to make way for the "march of progress." Although Tempest loves her and longs to protect her, he knows that he can neither marry her nor keep her from harm. Andree, alive, is a threat to the civilization that he represents. The narrator's voice is not jubilant, but it is remarkably firm and straightforward--Dick must "break" Andree, just as men must "break" the land in order to impose on it the new pattern of patriarchal civilization. Even though this remolding requires the violent destruction of Nature and of the old order, the sacrifice must be made in order to accommodate a greater good. What is most interesting about this passage is the naked anthropocentricism and Eurocentrism which limit the author's perception of necessity. Unable to envision an alternative to the female/male, Nature/civilization dichotomy, she concludes that there is "no escape" from the law that white men, rulers at the pinnacle of the ethnic and gender hierarchy, must dominate the earth.

This male dominance is central to both the structure and the theme of Steele's novel. Structurally, the sole function of women in the story is to serve Hector. They have no independent life of their own but appear and disappear according to the dictates of his need. Indeed, three of the women-- Nita Oswald, Georgina Harris and Moon--exist only to save Hector's life. Thematically, although they have an important impact on major events, women have no status in the official hierarchy of power. They have a lot of **influence**, but they do

not make political decisions and they do not play a leading role in the action. Instead, their activities take place **behind** the scenes of power. Two brief episodes illustrate their secondary status. In the first, a youthful Hector is angry and indignant when he learns that George Harris, a young man who has sought his friendship, is really a girl. "He had not, at that time," the narrator says, "the perception to realize that it was the first shadow of things to come, sent to open his eyes to his dawning power" (19). Georgina is reduced to subterfuge to order to make Hector's acquaintance; he, from his position of power, arrogantly dismisses her. Many years later she risks her life in order to warn Hector that her lover plans to assassinate him. The end of the scene is a curious one which tells us much about the role of women:

> Georgina Harris--the hideous truth confronted him. The girl had followed the path that might have been expected, then. This painted, wornout woman, mistress to a criminal, was Georgina Harris. Life suddenly seemed a terrible thing, youth dead with them both--
>
> "I loved you once, Hector," she said wanly. "That's why I couldn't see you shot in cold blood--now. Don't condemn me, Hector. Please!"
>
> He could not speak a word. (341)

Why is the knowledge that the woman is Georgina a "hideous truth"? Is Steele suggesting that women who take initiative in their relationships with men are likely, and deservedly, to end up as "trash"? Although Hector is silenced at the end of the scene, the power lies entirely with him. He has controlled his own destiny and the destiny of a nation; she had earlier failed in her attempt to court his friendship and now, having succeeded in her attempt to warn him of danger, pathetically pleads with him not to condemn her. It is a man's world,

this iron-spirited region of the West! A second episode, almost insignificant in terms of the plot, is important because it symbolically illustrates the limitations of the woman's role. Nita Oswald, a reporter for the Montreal Comet, appears before Hector in a constable's uniform when her luggage is lost and her clothes thoroughly soaked after her boat upsets on the river. Hector, although momentarily taken aback by the strange sight of a woman in policeman's garb, good-humouredly tells her that he will overlook her offence even though it is "a misuse of the Queen's uniform." There has never been a woman constable in Discovery: "Nothing like it had been seen in the Territory before," the narrator tells us, "nor was ever seen again" (287). Indeed, there is no room in the patriarchal world of Steele's West for a woman who challenges masculine supremacy. Nita is a courageous person who undertakes a long and dangerous journey in pursuit of journalistic excellence, but her major role in the novel is that of care-giver to a man. Along with the waitress Seattle Sue, she nurses Hector back to health after his dangerous bout of typhoid fever. Unable to win power on her own terms, she takes refuge in the conventional (and comparatively powerless) role assigned to women.

The other women in the novel are similarly relegated to supportive roles. Hector's mother teaches her son "such of those fine, old-fashioned principles as the Colonel had been too busy to teach." His little sister Nora, regarding him with adoration, "had done much to make him chivalrous" (16). Frances motivates him to fulfill his dreams of greatness. These women, in their love, serve Hector faithfully; they do not exercise power directly. Instead, they play the role of spiritual guides that, Sleeping Thunder tells Hector, the Indians admired in their women:

> "We are ourselves weak and corrupt. We feel in our hearts the need of something to help us to be better. So we ask that help from these, our women.

> We make of Purity a torch of light and put that torch in the hands of those we love, to guide us through the storm. We would have our women . . . as high above us, as white and clear as yonder stars, to show us the way, as **they** do." (50)

Sleeping Thunder's words suggest that women are powerful beings who influence the behavior of men. In Steele's novel they do, in fact, influence Hector's destiny, but they do so at enormous cost to themselves. What little power they possess they purchase at the cost of subservience to "masculine" values and to the betrayal of their own interests.

The relationship between Hector and Moon, daughter of Sleeping Thunder, is the key to Steele's interpretation of the respective roles of women and men. Sleeping Thunder, in an effort to help Hector reconcile the "cruelty" of the Sun Dance that makes a man a brave with the "beauty" of a woman's renewal of her vows of purity, says that both ceremonies affirm aboriginal values. "What, after all, do we most admire in a man?" he asks Hector. "White men and red alike, we especially admire strength, courage and fortitude." The Sun Dance provides young men with the opportunity to display these qualities, which "crown a man with glory as his antlers crown the caribou" (50). There is, therefore, nothing strange in the observance of these ceremonies by one and the same people--both glorify qualities that Indians admire. That strength, courage and fortitude in men is equally admired in white culture is evident in Spirit-of-Iron, as is the importance of the more passive virtue of purity in women. (Remember the fate of Georgina Harris, who violates that code.) Steele's treatment of the Hector -Moon relationship, however, illustrates the comparative power of "masculine" fortitude and "feminine" purity. When Sleeping Thunder offers Hector the hand of his daughter in marriage, Hector rejects his offer because, he says, he does not love Moon the

way a man should love the woman he marries. Although Moon later pleads with him to take her, even if it is only to be his slave, Hector is adamant. He enlists the help of the local missionary, who promises to arrange for her to marry an Indian brave. Three months later Father Duval sends a letter to Hector telling him that she has married Loud Gun: "She is happy. . . . I promise you, her heart is mended! She is happy" (66). And there the story ends--for the time being. Hector has behaved wisely in avoiding the impulse to marry a woman who, though both pure and beautiful, is a member of a culturally inferior race and he has behaved benevolently in helping to arrange her marriage to Loud Gun. But Moon is not happy and her heart is not mended; in the pathetic conclusion to her story lies the basis for an ecofeminist deconstruction of Spirit-of-Iron.

The events surrounding Moon's death provide the occasion for Hector's promotion to a position of increased power and abruptly conclude Moon's importance in the novel. Hector's trumpeter, during a campaign against resistance forces in the 1885 Rebellion, shoots an unarmed Indian woman. Unable to stop his trumpeter's fire, Hector goes to the woman; seeing that she is dying, he has "only one thought--to question her about the rebels" (159). Then he realizes that the woman is Moon. Moon tells him that her husband is one of the rebels. She has left him because he beats her; ironically, she goes to Hector in order to find protection: "I--thought 'how pleased and surprised he--will be.' But, oh--they shot me!" (160). What is Hector's response to this very romantic scene? Does he cover her face with kisses and whisper words of comfort in her ear? No; his first thought, predictably, is for his duty and he asks Moon where the rebels have gone. When Moon learns that her information will help Hector, she tells him where he can find her people--then dies happy because she has been able to serve the man she loves:

> "I--could--not--have--you for my own self; and you--would not let--me--be your servant then. But the Great--Spirit, He--has been--so kind to me. He has--let me--aid you--serve you--when you--most needed me--and in the--end. Oh, you of the gentle heart--see how your kindness to the--poor and lowly--brings you--a reward!" (161-2)

Although Hector feels compassion for this woman who loves him--a tear rolls down his cheek as she dies in his arms--his heart is not really with her; it is with his work. Immediately after Moon's death he sets off in pursuit of the rebels, captures the rebel leader, and returns home to great honour. The Lieutenant-Governor praises him for his "single-handed" achievement in bringing the campaign to a "swift and glorious conclusion" (164), Hector is promoted, and there the matter ends. Now, it is true that Hector deserves his success--he works hard and makes many sacrifices to achieve it. But Moon also makes a major sacrifice. Although she dies happy, her reward is not commensurate with what it costs her to achieve it. Indeed, her fate is not appreciably better than that of Lizzie, the Indian woman who lives with Welland and who suffers much abuse at his hands. "Yet, with the dumb devotion characteristic of the Indian woman," the narrator tells us, "she had borne it all, content to suffer his injustice if only she might dedicate her life to him" (98). Lizzie, at some cost to herself, warns Welland of a Police raid in time to allow him to escape capture. Having served her purpose, she then disappears from the novel. Welland leaves the country and later re-emerges as Molyneux, wealthy businessman, Member of Parliament and influential voice in the powerful world of grain and cattle marketing. Although Hector is a "good" man on the side of law and order, and Welland/Molyneux is a villain of the deepest dye, there is an unmistakeable similarity between them. Both are strong men who wield

considerable power in their social hierarchy and both are served by Indian women who sacrifice their lives and identities for the men they love[15]. Hector is clearly the hero of Steele's novel and Molyneux is clearly the villain; in the similarity of their relationships to women Steele unwittingly provides the reader with grounds for a critical analysis of the hierarchy of power in which they both participate.

A comparable similarity between Hector and Greasy Jones, criminal and would-be revolutionary, further undercuts Steele's endorsement of patriarchy. Molyneux, in an effort both to extend his own power and to obtain revenge on Hector, enlists the help of Jones in planning the overthrow of legitimate authority in Black Elk Territory (somewhere in the interior of British Columbia). "It needs a man with real guts, who doesn't care a hoot in hell for anyone, to run this thing" (275), he tells Greasy Jones. Hector, of course, does care for other people and he does care, passionately, for the cause of social order; like Jones and Molyneux, however, he sees in the prospect of revolution opportunities for his own advancement. His thoughts, when he learns that he has an opportunity to capture the leader of the 1885 rebellion, are as much of himself as they are of his country: "He thought of that night in Regina when he had seen in this uprising a marvellous opportunity. But he had never dreamed of it developing such an opportunity as this! For a moment he felt as if everything were already his--Frances--success--the world--" (156). It is important to recognize that there **is** a difference between Hector's resolve to increase his power by crushing rebellion and Molyneux's and Jones's determination to gain power by overthrowing the government, but the difference has as much to do with social validity as it does with the

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[15]Although Hector does not beat Moon, as Welland does Lizzie, he is at least partly responsible for her marriage to Loud Gun, who does physically abuse her.

intrinsic merits of the revolution. Molyneux, attempting to justify his own greed, supports the legitimacy of revolution by arguing that the strong men should rule the country whether or not they are in the majority: "Might makes right in a new country and it ought to here" (274). How much difference is there between his sentiments and Hector's instruction to Father Duval that he point out to the Indians the futility of rebellion because the "power of the great White Mother" (151) makes opposition to her will impossible? How much difference is there in the personal power of Molyneux (or of Jones) and the personal power of Hector, "the man on whom depended everything in Black Elk (334)? "Might makes right" not just in a new country, but in any country ruled by a powerful oligarchy.

Steele's account of Hector's relationship with Frances shows that it is not only native women who suffer under this social system, but women in general. Frances loves Hector and wants to marry him--and there is no good reason for her not to accept a proposal of marriage from this very eligible man. Her father, however, refuses to give his consent and so Frances and Hector must wait twenty years before they can marry. Major Edginton, a minor character in the novel, is nonetheless important because of the role that he plays in the plot--his refusal to grant permission provides the obstacle that must be overcome in Hector's quest to win the hand of Frances--and because he provides a useful symbol of patriarchy. Mrs. Edginton, a sweet, docile woman who "had long played second fiddle to the Major" (130) would willingly support her daughter, but she is powerless. Her husband, "a bit of a tyrant . . . regular martinet" (128), as a neighbour says, controls both the women in his family. This male dominance is an important component of the new society that develops in the West. Although the narrative tone is critical of Major Edginton for his pigheadedness and

intolerance[16], Steele is not critical of the patriarchal system which gives the Major control over his daughter. Frances's father, rude and arrogant to those beneath him in the social hierarchy, is almost a caricature of the patriarch, yet he reminds Hector of his father, whom he remembers with respect, and weak Mrs. Edginton reminds him of his own beloved mother. The narrator does not deny that Frances is made unhappy by her father--during her long separation from Hector she is first confined to her father's house, an object of paternal surveillance, and then is forced to marry a man of her father's choice. Her explanation for her marriage, indeed, clearly establishes her as a victim of great injustice:

> "I had to marry him. Oh, Hector, I can't tell you the agony, the shame, I went through--the fight I made. But it was no good. I married him at last--because I had to, Hector." (344)

Not until both her husband and her parents are dead is she free to marry the man she loves. Although the authorial voice approves of their marriage--it does, after all, provide the happy ending to the novel--it does not condemn the social system which delays it by twenty years. Steele criticises a **misuse** of power rather than the **nature** of that power. Such abuse, however, is an inevitable part of a social system which empowers men at the expense of women. "Domination power", based on the ranking of one half of humanity over the other (Eisler xvii), gives men the "right" to control both women and Nature. The social repercussions of this oppression early manifested themselves in the suffrage movement; not until the last twenty years, however, have the ecological consequences of suppressing

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[16]Major Edginton refuses to let Frances marry Hector, even though he is a "gentleman," because Hector is a non-commisioned officer with neither wealth nor high social standing to recommend him.

"feminine" values become apparent in western Canadian society.

How much connection is there, in prairie literature, between the oppression of women and the destruction of wild Nature? Is Lancaster's use of Andree as a symbol of wilderness only an isolated recognition of the connection between patriarchy and civilization? Are industrial capitalism and male control a necessary part of the social order of the "Old World"? Harwood Steele's Spirit-of-Iron suggests that there is in fact a correlation between the nature of power and the kind of economic development that takes place. Under a patriarchal structure in which power results both from the connection to the Empire and from the strength of muscle and will, Western development proceeded in a way characteristic of the dominator society. Rather than value the connectedness, diversity and earth-based spirituality of an egalitarian, "feminine" culture, Canadian prairie society acquired the authoritarian, "masculine" power base that enabled it to transform a wilderness into civilization.

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Chapter Seven

Playing a Man's Game: Women and Androcentric Development in The Heart of Cherry McBain and The Lobstick Trail

a fist knows what it can do
without the nuisance of speaking:
it grabs and smashes.

Margaret Atwood, Power Politics, 1971[1]

The Mounted Police novel is not the only western Canadian romance that makes a connection between patriarchal power and the transformation of wilderness to civilization. Other prairie fiction further underlines the symbiotic relationship between male dominance and economic progress. The dominator worldview which privileged men above women also privileged men above the natural world and thus made ideologically acceptable the exploitation of the vast, untamed "new" land in the West. The Heart of Cherry McBain (1919) and The Lobstick Trail (1921), both by Manitoba writer Douglas Durkin, focus on the building of two important patriarchal institutions--the railway and the mining industry. Part of the unofficial literature of prairie boosterism, they cast a romantic glow over the men who risked life and capital to build roadbeds and to develop the mineral resources of the North West. The rules which govern this development, however, empower men at the expense of

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[1]p. 31.

women and Nature. In the androcratic world of high stakes and big losers, wealth and power are awarded to men who have the physical strength and moral will to win "the game;" death and failure are allotted to the women (and men) who value human community and wildness above the conquest of Nature. Although Durkin pays tribute to the bold entrepreneurs who exploit this "masculine" paradigm of power, an ecofeminist reading of his novels reveals the high human and ecological costs of denying integrity to both the feminine and the natural world[2].

The Heart of Cherry McBain is a wilderness romance that celebrates the contribution of railroad builders to the settlement of the West. Set in the foothills of what is now Alberta during the railroad construction of the early 1880s, the novel tells the story of King Howden's quest to win the heart of Cherry McBain, daughter of the boss of the roadbed construction crew. Durkin makes explicit the connection between his hero's personal quest and the social quest to bring civilization to a wilderness outpost. King recognizes, shortly after he falls in love with Cherry, that "the heart of Cherry McBain could be won and held only by a man that was not afraid of himself, a man who had a task so great that it overshadowed petty

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[2]Durkin's critical treatment of industrial capitalism in his best-known work, The Magpie (1923), suggests that he was conscious of the high social costs of economic progress. Protagonist Craig Forester, recently returned from the Great War, is angry with the Winnipeg businessmen who want to restore the economic order out of which the War grew: "When we went to the front to fight, it was with the idea that we were fighting to bring in a new order. We regarded the German nation as the last word in the old order. . . . She was the very symbol of Progress and Efficiency. We went out to defeat that--that machine" (141). His oppositional vision of a just, humane world, however, is crushed by the greed and self-interest of big business owners and financial speculators. Disillusioned by their hypocrisy, embittered by his wife's desertion and temporarily impoverished by a stock market collapse, he sells his seat on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and returns to the soul-satisfying, honourable life of a farmer. This authorial critique of the business world has no counterpart in either The Heart of Cherry McBain or The Lobstick Trail.

problems and made them insignificant by comparison" (128). This task centres on transforming the wilderness. Since King does not use words easily he cannot articulate, even to himself, his vision of the populated countryside that would replace the silent fields and forests. What he dreams of, however, is similar to the local Dominion Land Agent's vision of "a great fertile valley . . . teeming with an eager-hearted, virile population devoted to the soil, and standing as one more outpost of empire, one more living monument to high endeavour" (108). King's contribution to the fulfillment of this dream involves first prospecting for a stand of trees which could provide ties for railroad construction and then working as the foreman of McBain's construction crew. By the end of the novel, however, he has married Cherry and settled on his own farm to enjoy the symbolic achievement of his quest. King is proud to have participated in the important work of roadbed construction: "There's something about it all that makes a man glad he has lived and taken some little part in it," he tells Cherry. "If we could see the world in the making--I think it would be something like this" (321). He has played a man's role in the game of nation-building and can enjoy his reward in the agricultural development that the railroad has made possible. Durkin does not question the nature of this development; ecofeminist theory, however, reveals the inconsistencies within the patriarchal paradigm and points to the social and ecological costs of its implementation.

Durkin's exuberant use of the masculine gender in his description of the West illustrates his positive attitude to a patriarchal model of development based upon competition for the exploitation of resources. It is no accident of terminology that the Canadian prairies is "a man's country" (94) and a "young man's land" (235). Physical strength and an iron will, masculine qualities in a patriarchal culture, are required by those who would wrest wealth

from an alien, often "hostile" land. The achievement of the Dominion Land Agent's vision of a prosperous agricultural settlement dictates a work force willing to expend muscle and nerve in order to reshape the landscape to meet human need: "He saw the hillsides, now virgin and wild under the afternoon sun, blocked and squared and trimmed by the hands of busy workers" (109). Is it surprising that brute force and indomitable will are highly valued in this world in which the workers strive to domesticate wild, "virgin" Nature?

Durkin's valuation of masculine strength and physical courage privileges those qualities which give men power over others and disempowers those who seek harmony through the nonviolent reconciliation of conflicting needs. Although King realizes that fighting is not the best way to settle disputes, that "only upon order and good judgment could men hope to build for the future in a new community" (90), the plot of the novel suggests that the power of fists is instrumental in enabling a man to achieve dominance[3]. King Howden is a strong, silent man. He is "not good at talking" (66), as he tells Cherry, but he can influence the progress of civilization by the judicious use of his physical strength. The chief obstacle to the roadbed construction, and therefore to the building of a railroad which would open the West to development, is foreman Bill McCartney, who engages boss Keith McBain in a struggle for power. McCartney is a tough, hard-hitting man respected for his ability to use his fists. McBain, small and dyspeptic, is no match for him physically, but he is able to dominate men by the force of his personality. His power lies not in his use of words, for he is a silent man like King Howden, but in his iron resolution. The men fear his

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[3]Durkin's novel does not invalidate my thesis, developed in the previous chapter, that power in the prairie West was the result of both masculine strength and access to the force of national and imperial law. The Heart of Cherry McBain, however, focuses on only the first of these sources of power.

piercing eyes and his "black sardonic smile that made an impenetrable mask for a soul that no man had ever seen revealed" (38) They respect him because he is a decent, honest man but, as Cherry tells King, "he's hard in his dealings and he crushes everyone who opposes him" (57). With protagonists like this it is no wonder that the battle for supremacy on the roadbed construction crew becomes a contest of physical strength and will[4]. Keith McBain wants to maintain control over his men and to extend his empire by obtaining timber rights on a stand of trees suitable for railroad ties. Bill McCartney wants to usurp McBain's power. King Howden, enlisted by Cherry, supports the side of "legitimate" authority--and the fight begins. The struggle is a win/lose situation in which power goes to the man who hits hardest and endures longest, and in which the loser gets nothing. Typical of economic and political contests in a dominator society, it silences the "feminine" voice of reconciliation and healing in order to empower "masculine" strength.

Since authority within a patriarchal society is opposed to emotional connectedness or compassion, as feminist theorist Kathleen Jones notes, women--and men who do not follow the rules of androcracy--are disempowered. These rules, the rules which govern development in the prairie West, dictate that power accrues to the strong. Compassion "cuts through [the] orderly universe" (Jones 121) of male authority with feelings that connect people to each other; it undermines the power of one individual over another, of one group over another, and therefore must be suppressed. Cherry's feminine strength and self-reliance, qualities that King loves in her, are of little value when she must help her father resist

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[4]Wrestling is an understandably popular form of entertainment in the McBain construction camp and in the neighbouring camp of a bridge construction crew. Under the guise of recreation the men sharpen those skills that give them power.

McCartney's challenge to his power[5]. The western wilderness is a man's world and she must play by the rules of a man's game. She must ask King to fight for her father because she cannot fight for him herself. There can be no attempt to mediate differences, no attempt to reach a solution in which each party gets something without giving up everything. King must fight because McCartney "would never be quiet until he himself had brought him to subjection by nothing but brute strength." Although he had hoped that in the future he would "only have to take up the struggle that men wage against nature in their efforts to make a living" (98), **the nature of that struggle is itself tied to the necessity of subduing the other.** The battle for human dominion of the land pits man against man, man against woman and man against Nature. King must fight with McCartney because McCartney challenges Keith McBain's control of railroad development in one part of the Alberta foothills. He must use his fists because, as he tells himself in another context, words are "helpless things after all" (127). The rules of patriarchal development favour the "masculine" gift of strength rather than the "feminine" gift of reconciliation.

By making Cherry dependent upon King Howden for the rescue of her father, and by rewarding this dependency, Durkin further privileges masculine strength above more passive "feminine" virtues. Cherry is, perhaps surprisingly given her role in the novel, a strong woman. Indeed, what King likes best about her is her self-reliance and her quiet courage: "He knew at a glance that she was not of the delicate, clinging kind that practise a languid air

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[5]Since McBain is the "sole embodiment of authority of any kind" (267) in his camp, he is in serious trouble when McCartney blackmails him. There is no second in command to assume power when McBain starts drinking and temporarily loses control of his crew. Although not intended as a critique of patriarchal hierarchy, Durkin's novel illustrates its vulnerability to dysfunction.

and never forget their sex. Here was a girl whose heart-beat was strong with the confidence and the reliance she had learned to place in herself . . ." (30). When Cherry determines to extricate her father from McCartney's clutches, however, she soon realises that her strength is inadequate **and that she must enlist the help of a man in order to accomplish her task**. Cherry's primary role in the novel is essentially passive; like Nature she is prize to a masculine victor of the development game. King throws "his whole soul" into railroad building because he knows that in "the game of life" which he is playing, "the prize [is] the heart of Cherry McBain" (90). Cherry, of course, is similarly rewarded with the hero's love, but she is rewarded for a very different reason. King earns her love by his participation in the masculine work of nation-building; Cherry (symbolically) earns his love by her feminine submission to male power[6].

Durkin's treatment of Anne McCartney, the only other woman in the novel, suggests that women are rewarded for acquiesence rather than action. Like Cherry, Anne is a strong woman and like Cherry she tries to help Keith MacBain. Anne's intervention in her husband's plot to overthrow his boss, however, is an active and independent one. She rescues McBain from Cheney's drinking establishment, drives him most of the way home on a trail made almost impassable by heavy rains, restores to him the timber claim that McCartney has unscrupulously staked for himself rather than for his employer and "persuades" McCartney to relinquish his hold on McBain by telling him the truth about the past. Although she does not fight with her fists, Anne does as much as any man to restore McBain to his position of

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[6]Cherry, unlike her feminine counterpart in The Lobstick Trail, is not opposed to the development in which her sweetheart is involved. Her submission is not to King's stronger will but to his greater strength.

power. Is she rewarded with wealth, with honour or with the love of a good man? The answer to that question is ambiguous at best. Anne has been falling in love with King Howden, but she selflessly relinquishes any claim on him when she realizes that he loves Cherry. Then, when Bill McCartney is defeated in his final battle for supremacy--a battle in which King upholds McBain's rule--she returns to the side of her estranged husband. Two final pictures of Anne are of her gently washing McCartney's swollen face and, later, of her bending over her sleeping husband, tears streaming down her cheeks. Is reunion with this man, liar and bully and cheat, a reward or a punishment? It is significant that Cherry, who lets a man fight her battles for her, emerges feminine victor of the field while Anne is awarded the booby prize. Durkin's treatment of a similar theme in The Lobstick Trail suggests that strong women who act independently will thereby forfeit the love of a good man; surely this threat will frighten many women from the public arena in which men battle for supremacy in the development game.

Although The Heart Of Cherry McBain contains no gender-based conflict over development issues--neither of the women is opposed to railroad building or resource exploitation--it validates an economic model that is essentially "masculine" in nature. As King realizes, there is "a man's work" to do in the creation of a "new country" (89). Laying steel track across hundreds of miles of parkland and prairie, raising towns and cities on the "virgin" plains and carving farms from a "hostile" wilderness requires both physical strength and the will to dominate Nature--qualities exemplified by men like King Howden and Keith McBain. There is unintentional irony, however, in the connection Durkin makes between masculine work and the creation of a "new" country; his settlers do not so much create a new culture as recast their old culture in a different mold. The Dominion Land Agent exults in

the realisation that the railroad will reconnect them to the world that they left behind: "The railway will be in before July, and the towns will be springing up and business will start and we'll be a part of the world we've just left before we know it" (114). It is, of course, understandable that Canadian and British settlers, shaken by their encounter with an unfamiliar landscape and with indigenous cultures foreign to their own, should attempt to recreate in their new communities the institutions and social practices of home. Civilization in the West thus came to reflect these "old" values (Morton 168, Rea 46-51) rather than a new set of values more appropriate to the historical and geographical reality of the prairies. European civilization, as I point out in my introduction, emerged from a Judaeo-Christian tradition that emphasised both male domination of women and human domination of Nature. In its Victorian manifestation it extolled scientific and economic progress as equivalent to moral progress (Altick 107-8). The development which Durkin's Dominion Land Agent envisions, based upon this anthropocentric and androcratic concept of the world, would not create a new society but would recreate the familiar patterns of the "old" world. These patterns, as Frederick Turner notes, would destroy the possibility of genuine change:

> It was as "another chance" that Europe was to think of this discovery of the "New World," once the news of it had gotten around. And so it might have been, since regeneration often may spring from an unexpected confrontation with radical newness. But Europe was wrong, and the confrontation was wrong from the start. (126)

Immigrants from Europe and eastern Canada, bringing with them the cultural values of home, failed to use the regenerative potential of the undeveloped prairies because they imposed upon the landscape and its indigenous people the same pattern of exploitation that

turned the Thames into a sewer and made the London air dark with smog. Durkin fails to recognize the incompatibility of androcentric development with the pastoral bliss that is King Howden's reward for his participation in the great work of nation-building. The conclusion of his novel, however, suggests the moral ambivalence that is characteristic of the wilderness romance.

Because Durkin does not recognize the incompatibility of Arcadia and economic progress, his final images of the prairie landscape are unclouded by forebodings about the social and aesthetic impact of development on the West. Cherry and King, riding home to their farm after a visit to the construction camp, enjoy a scene of pastoral harmony:

> Then came upon them the silence of the evening and the magic of it. In the west was the dying flame of a day that had set. About them lay the woods and the grassy reaches of plain, with a deep hush upon them broken only by the occasional sleepy twitter of birds, or the lazy croaking of frogs in the hollows, or the sharp whistle of night-hawks that swept down above them on whirring wings. And from far away there came the sound of someone singing in the night. (325)

Since the vastness of the Canadian prairie enabled it to absorb extensive development without showing the signs of ecological dysfunction that plagued smaller, more densely-settled regions, Durkin had no way of knowing that industry and agri-business would one day transform his idyllic landscape into utilitarian monocultures of wheat and alfalfa-bromegrass[7]. Androcratic development, however, privileges productivity and economic gain

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[7]Even such comparatively recent writers as Edward McCourt expressed faith in the inviolable nature of the great plains. "Industrialization and urban development may continue

above such intangibles as natural beauty and ecological diversity. The railroad would encourage the development of modern agriculture, which in turn would obliterate "the woods and the grassy reaches of plain" because of the incompatibility of high yield and maximum profit with the continued existence of wild Nature. The arcadian images with which Durkin concludes The Heart of Cherry McBain thus suggest the inconsistency inherent in his vision of a prosperous, pastoral utopia.

Durkin's failure to recognize the tension between his protagonist's delight in the tranquil beauty of the wilderness and his endorsement of economic progress that would destroy wild Nature is even more apparent in his second novel, The Lobstick Trail (1921). Set in the area around The Pas, Manitoba, the novel idealizes the bold entrepreneurs who develop the mineral resources of the North. Kirk Brander's heroic quest is to gain control of two copper mines whose development would provide the economic basis for a thriving community. This quest takes on the character of a sacred mission; Canadians must develop their northern resources in order to meet the needs of a national, and international, market:

> "God Almighty's going to give Canada the next hundred years to make good in, an' she's got to make good by herself or forget about it and let someone else handle the deal. We've got enough fish in the lakes north of the Saskatchewan to feed the rest of the world week-days and Fridays. There's more good salmon in the Hudson Bay than they ever dreamed of in Alaska or

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to pollute prairie streams and obliterate farmlands," he says in the conclusion to his revised edition of The Canadian West in Fiction (1970), "but it is impossible to conceive of a time when the enormous vault of sky will be blotted out by smog and the great plains wholly defiled by man and his works" (125). Such attitudes rendered unnecessary any serious concern for the West's ecological future.

> British Columbia. There's enough water power here in one province to turn every wheel, light every house and every street in every village, town and city from Halifax to Vancouver. There's timber and stone and minerals--why, God bless my soul, it isn't a question of whether the stuff's here or not. It's a question of whether we're packing the kind of stuff here"--and [Kirk] placed his hand over his belt--"that'll handle the deal." (20-21)

Viewed within this context, men like Kirk have a positive **duty** to develop the "limitless possibilities" (42) of the North. Mining becomes not a source of individual enrichment, but a benevolent activity designed to enhance the public good. God has done His part by providing resources in abundance--it remains only for men with courage and guts to exploit them.

The problem that develops in the novel, however, results not from a shortage of bold entrepreneurs but from the competition to develop this "last, unexploited mineral district on the continent" (42). Two parties want to purchase options on John Allen's "White Squaw" and John Mackay's "Micmac". Kirk Brander represents the interests of his uncle, Winnipeg businessman Henry Tyne, and Warren K. Paxton of the Ripple Creek Copper Mining Company represents the interests of some nameless Winnipeg investors. It is in his portrayal of the key players in this "great game where men of means would play strong hands to win big stakes" (43) that Durkin reveals some of the inconsistencies of patriarchal development.

Although the object of Kirk's endeavour is identical to Paxton's--both men want to develop copper mines on the White Squaw and Micmac properties--one man is a hero and the other is a villain. The hero, of course, behaves nobly in the pursuit of his quest while the villain performs dastardly deeds which violate the rules of the "game;" the only other

difference between them lies in their vision of local versus outside control of mining development. Kirk tells John Mackay that he wants the wealth from the mines to stay in the community and to provide the means of building their own city in the North: "I want to bring people here--I want to see men and women here--and busy streets--and human life in the making" (294). Paxton, he says, has a different kind of dream and will "fail" even if he fulfills his most ambitious expectations because he "doesn't care for our kind of success" (295). It is difficult, however, to see any genuine difference in the plans of the two men. Although the narrator is vague about who ultimately controls the mining developments, the source of capital for both projects is the same--investment from the Winnipeg business community. The narrative tone approves Kirk's loyalty to the local community and condemns Paxton's greedy ruthlessness, yet the real power behind **both** men is a profit-oriented syndicate. There is no reason to assume that Henry Tyne's investors are more altruistic than Paxton's associates. By focusing on the personality differences between Kirk and Paxton, and by dressing Paxton in villain's garb, Durkin obscures the essential similarity between the two parties that compete for control of the northern copper deposits[8]. **Their vision of industrialization, finally, is the same**. The concerns of the old miners about the impact of ambitious outsiders on the North applies equally well to both Paxton and Brander & Tyne. John Mackay is uneasy about the presence of strangers "whose power was money and whose sense of values had long been distorted because it had been permitted no expression except what it could find in terms of dollars and cents" (179). John Allen worries these men will snatch what wealth they can and go away with it "leaving the place blasted

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[8]The competing mining interests, like the rival fur trading companies in Agnes Laut's Lords of the North, are virtually indistinguishable in their common pursuit of wealth.

and ugly" (199). Because the point of view of the novel is Kirk's we do not get a picture of the kind of development that Paxton envisions, but we do get a vivid description of what Kirk wants. Earlier in the novel, overlooking the area where the mine is to be developed, he is simultaneously struck by the beauty of the region and by its potential for economic development. It is the latter possibility, however, that captures his imagination. Although he is sensitive to the majesty of the scene before him, what he really sees is a wilderness transformed into civilization: "He saw the hillside just below him quicken into life and activity; he saw the trees fall back and in their places come houses and streets with people walking about in busy pursuits; he heard the hum of a great town at work, the ceaseless grind of its wheels, the constant rush of its traffic" (141). He sees himself as the inspiration of this scene of activity, and looks forward to the day when he will be able to do "a man's work" in creating it. In describing the achievement of Kirk's dream, however, Durkin unwittingly creates a dystopian vision of an industrial future devoid of charm or beauty.

Durkin's descriptions of the development of the copper mines, hallowed by their association with the hero's success, suggest to the modern reader the sort of nightmare image portrayed by the opponents of mechanization[9]. The exploratory work at Kirk's camp during the drilling of test shafts, for example, results in activity that is frenetic in its intensity:

> The work in the camp had been in full swing for a month with gangs of men working in double shifts so that not an hour of the twenty-four was lost. Even as they waited for the gong to summon them to supper the ground beneath

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[9]See, for example, Thomas Hardy's description of threshing at Flintcomb-Ash Farm in part six of Tess of the d'Urbervilles or Archibald Lampman's nightmare vision of industrialization in "The City of the End of Things."

> their feet shook perceptibly from the shock of the explosions in the shafts. The regular puffing that came from the engine house, the noisy rattle of the lifts in the shafts, the metallic roar of the rock tumbling out of the carriers and rolling down the side of the ore dump, all gave evidence of life and activity. From the lake came the laboured chug-chug of a gasoline launch towing in a raft of wood that was almost too much for it. (182)

There is nothing idyllic in this description of the noise and motion of the mining camp. The sense of urgency, the "shock of explosions," the sound of engines and the "noisy rattle" of lifts, the "metallic roar" of tumbling rock and the "laboured chug-chug" of a gasoline launch would be as appropriate on a battlefield as in a northern copper mine. Durkin's choice of nouns and adjectives suggests his (possibly unconscious) recognition that, in exploiting the buried treasures of the earth, man wages war on Nature.

Durkin's final description of Kirk's plans for the White Squaw and Micmac mines shatters any illusion that an optimistic reader might have regarding the intrinsic merits of development designed to provide wealth for the local community rather than for outside entrepreneurs. There is nothing about the nature of Kirk's dream that distinguishes it in any way from the dream of a less altruistic developer. Near the end of the novel he discusses with Jule, whom he is about to marry, the implications of the reports he has received from his uncle in Winnipeg. The magnitude of the mining project is going to surpass his wildest expectations:

> "It's going to be even bigger than I dreamed," he said with full boyish enthusiasm. "We'll have to bring power here, enough power to work one of the biggest mines on this continent. We may have to go all the way to the

> Burntwood. Jove, it'll make Paxton's little old ideas look like a peep-show in a cigar-box alongside a three-ring circus. We'll have to put in a cofferdam and drain half the lake to work the new ore-body properly. It'll take a year or more for the government to build the railway in from The Pas--but that's settled. And we'll have a town of our own, Jule, with five thousand people." (331)

Since Paxton, whose ideas will look like "a peep-show in a cigar-box alongside a three-ring circus," is the villain of the novel, it is reasonable to assume that Durkin intends us to think well of Kirk's bigger and "better" plans. These plans require the installation of a power plant, the construction of a railroad from The Pas and the drainage of half a lake. Rather than responding with humility and awe to the prospect of a project with such enormous impact on the natural environment, Kirk is exhilarated and full of "boyish enthusiasm" at the thought of the challenge that lies before him. That the author gives him his blessing is evident in the concluding lines of the novel: ". . . the old lobstick that stood with arms outstretched above the rapids bowed his tufted head before a stiff night wind. And one that did not know might have thought his head was bowed because of the three mounds that lay side by side under the shelter of the lower branches" (333-4). Instead of mourning the woman and two men who died in the race to develop the North, the lobstick--a tree shaped to provide direction to travellers on a northern trail--bows its head in respect to the enterprising young couple who had "found satisfaction in a great work and comfort in a great love" (334). Metaphorically, it functions as a signpost that guides the reader to the author's ideological intent. The Lobstick Trail is a tribute to the male players in an androcentric development game and to the woman who sacrifices her bond with wild Nature for the greater love of a man.

Although Jule Allen does not play an active part in the development of the North, her function as the hero's help-mate indicates the role that women traditionally play under androcracy. Like the women in Steele's Spirit-of-Iron, Jule provides her beloved with the moral support that he needs in order to do a "man's job." In a conversation on their wedding day Kirk tells Jule that the development of the mines poses a wonderful challenge:

> "Jove, girl, there's a man-sized job right here that'll take a whole lifetime". . . .
>
> "And the woman-sized job?" she asked him.
>
> "Making a man--man's size," he smiled. (331)

Woman plays the back-up role, the nurturing role, the role of care-giver to father and husband. Since the **important** work centres on developing the copper mines, she plays a subsidiary role of value primarily because it furthers the work of men. In this patriarchal world where power accrues to the winners in the development game, her compassion and her sense of connection to others renders her virtually helpless.

Kirk Brander, on the other hand, becomes a powerful player because he develops those qualities--physical strength and the will to dominate--which grant men the authority to control women, Nature and weaker men. Kirk had given the five years he spent in the North to "the stern business of making a man of himself" (3). Life there, the narrator tells us, had done much "to put iron into his will" (4). Although the "wild forces in nature" provide obstacles to victory, they also teach a man to endure adversity and to maintain faith and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. Kirk learns his lessons well: "He had taken and given measure for measure whether he bargained with nature or man. He had proven to himself that he could take up a man's task and see it through" (7). Since the rules that govern the performance of this task, like the comparable rules in The Heart of Cherry McBain,

emphasise the "masculine" strengths of muscle, nerve and the drive for dominance, they give power to men at the expense of women. The dogteam race that provides much of the excitement at the beginning of the novel is therefore important, although it is peripheral to the plot, because it eloquently restates these rules--the fastest and strongest and toughest man wins and takes the prize; the loser gains nothing from his exertions. Although both sets of rules insist that "the game" must be played honourably, that one man must not take unfair advantage of another by cheating or by using illegitimate force, their emphasis on winning at the expense of another privileges the "masculine" values of an androcratic society.

Central to an ecofeminist critique of The Lobstick Trail is a recognition of a "feminine" alternative to the dominator model of power **over** the other. Eisler talks about a nondestructive, "win-win" view of power which provides a means of "advancing one's own development **without** at the same time having to limit the development of others" (193). Such an egalitarian concept challenges all relations of domination. The goal of ecofeminism "is not just to change who wields power, but to transform the structure of power itself" (Starhawk, "Power, Authority, and Mystery" 76). This transformation requires a validation of the connectedness, nurturance and compassion which form the basis of what Eisler calls a "partnership" model of society. Surprisingly enough, Durkin does propose this model--although he rejects it in favour of male dominance. What is most interesting about his ideological stance, however, is his rejection of woman's participation in the battle for power. Although authority and control are necessary and desirable attributes in the male players, they make a woman unfit for her **real** position in the development game--that of helpmate to a man.

In his depiction of Marion Curtis, Durkin illustrates the fate of women who compete

with men in the public world of power. Marion is a strong, intelligent and attractive woman who has an "unbreakable will of her own" (30). Her self-confidence and her "dominating business ability" (34) make her a likely candidate for success in the competitive struggle for control of the White Squaw and Micmac copper mines. Indeed, she is at least as capable and powerful as any of the men in the novel. Marion, however, is a woman; although her sex does not disqualify her from the game, her "masculine" qualities prevent her from winning the prize that she seeks. She does not want prestige or wealth: "What does a woman want with all this-this scrambling after dollars?" she asks Kirk. "There's only one failure in the life of any woman-- only one defeat--and I--I can't--bah!" (255). She cannot quite bring herself to tell Kirk that he is the reward she has unsuccessfully sought; later, however, she confesses her loss to Jule: "Jule, dear, you do not know how rich you are. You are too young--and too happy. And you cannot understand how poor I am" (332). Marriage and the love of a good man are the true rewards for feminine virtue; by competing with men in the battle for power, Marion has lost her opportunity for happiness in the domestic sphere which is woman's natural place in life.

Although our sense of justice may be outraged by a set of rules which punishes women for behavior which gives power to men, from an ecofeminist view we must recognize that Marion's vision of development is no better than Kirk's. Jule Allen, however, has an alternative vision of what should happen in the North. In silencing her voice the author silences opposition to the patriarchal model of development.

Jule's sense of identification with the land near her home makes her want to protect its natural beauty from destruction. She watches with fear the growth of Henry Tyne's camp at the Micmac and Warren Paxton's camp at an adjoining mine. Both developments threaten

the life of freedom she has enjoyed in a pristine Northland:

> The world she had known as her own was being invaded by strangers. Even now, with the work only beginning, she felt that the place was no longer her own. She had gone about freely for years, had romped and played over ground that she called her own without finding anyone to dispute the claim. Already, she felt, the limits of her freedom were being set by the newcomers. To her it seemed that her sacred rights were being outraged. (179-80)

Jule's initial reaction makes no distinction between Tyne's "good" development and Paxton's "bad" development. Although she tells herself that she should be happy at the prospect of a prosperous town replacing her beloved wilderness, she is distressed by the violation of her "sacred" rights. The land is important to her--important not only because it offers freedom, but also because its wild beauty offers her a sense of connection to the divine. John Allen's response when Paxton tells him that he intends to develop power on the falls where Jule has played since a child emphasises her spiritual identification with Nature: "For years my girl has gone there to rest, she has taken her work there and sat for hours above it, it's been to her like a--like a house of God . . ." (192). To Marion Curtis and to most of the men in the novel, Nature is a source of wealth; to Jule it is a source of holiness and joy[10].

Although Jule's struggle to preserve the falls makes her an initial player in the development game, her compassion and sense of connection to others soon robs her of power

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[10]Durkin further emphasizes Jule's spiritual connection to the land by the brief episode in which Kirk and Marion enter the Allen cabin and see Jule sitting at the table choosing perennial flowers from a seed catalogue. Although Durkin may have intended the flowers to symbolize Jule's commitment to the North, they can also symbolize the living beauty which will be destroyed by large-scale mining development.

to influence the outcome of that development. "The ecofeminist's task," Judith Plant notes, "is one of developing the ability to take the place of the other when considering the consequences of possible actions, and ensuring that we do not forget that we are all part of one another" (156). It is precisely this identification with the other, however, that disempowers Jule. When her father dies she becomes the owner of the White Squaw, with accompanying control over the development of that property. Initially adamant in her refusal to sell the mine, she determines to preserve the natural beauty of Ripple creek. Paxton plans to use the falls as a source of water power but he wants, even more, to defeat Henry Tyne in their battle over the copper mines. When he first approaches Jule and offers not to develop the falls as long as she agrees not to sell to Tyne, Jule's response is strong and proud:

> "When I refuse to sell the White Squaw . . . it will not be because you have it in your power to take away the beauty from the place that has been mine for the best part of my life. The first man who lays a hand on that--I believe I'd kill him. If I sell the White Squaw it will be because I want to and I'll choose my own buyer. I shall not sell to you--and I shall not sell to Henry Tyne." (239-40)

Ownership of property gives Jule power in a patriarchal world. She faces Paxton as an equal, asking no quarter and giving none. When she realizes that an insistence on her rights will destroy Henry Tyne, however, she concedes defeat. Jones, discussing the implications of Carol Gilligan's research on male and female response to decision making, notes that men more than women tend to be willing to sacrifice relationships in order to follow established rules. "It may be interesting," she notes, "to consider the ways that a 'female' stress on relationship over rules or abstract rights modifies the ways that authority is constituted and

practiced" (123). A central problem with the patriarchal development paradigm, however, is the way it disempowers those who privilege relationship over rules. Rather than modify the way in which authority is practiced, Jule loses her status as a player in the game.

Since the rules award success to the strong and the ruthless, Jule's insistence on compassion for the weak represents a radical departure from precedent. She can see that men are being destroyed in the battle for supremacy; her father is broken, she tells Paxton, "because men in a fight never know when to quit" (259). She insists that his death should not have been necessary, that there should be some way for everyone to live together and work together. She sees Henry Tyne weakening and is afraid that yet another man will be lost in the struggle. Valuing human community and connectedness above all else, she tells Paxton that she will let him develop power on the creek if he will leave Tyne alone:

> "You came to me only a few days ago about the water power on Ripple Creek. You said you would respect my wishes regarding the rapids. I'm afraid I wasn't very nice about it, but I couldn't think of anyone spoiling the most beautiful thing I have ever known. And I wouldn't have let you do it, in spite of your lease and law and everything. But I have changed my mind. I know you will think it isn't in my power to change your plans. But--anyhow--I'll be willing to see anything done to the rapids--and I won't say a word--if you'll leave Henry Tyne free--if you'll be content to do your work here and let him do his over there." (260-1)

Jule is willing to give up the "most beautiful thing" she has ever known, to see "anything done" to her beloved rapids, if Paxton will cease to compete with a business rival who, we

can assume, has devoted the biggest part of his life to that competition. Because she and Paxton are interrupted by the arrival of Kirk and his uncle, the bargain is never made. Her willingness to sacrifice her interests for another, however, is clearly part of the feminine attractiveness which is validated by the narrative line of the novel. It is Jule Allen, not Marion Curtis, who wins the hero. Men like Kirk and Tyne and Paxton, if they play their cards well, can make decisions which affect the future of their country; assertive women like Marion are penalized by failure in love, while "good" women like Jule (even though they are rewarded with marriage) see their power and freedom eroded by an androcratic development paradigm.

How conscious is Durkin that patriarchy exacts a dreadful price? His narrator extols, with obvious admiration, the romance of the undeveloped North--the pristine beauty of the snow-clad river, the stillness of the vast, open spaces, the clear blue sky whose horizons shut out "the world of smoke and noise and corruption." To Kirk, who has spent the best five years of his life here, the land provides both solace and inspiration: "He knew that wherever he might find failure and disappointment and defeat, he could return here and find his veins filling again with vigor and courage and desire" (111). That development will bring the "smoke and noise and corruption" of civilization to the North is evident; one has only to look at the description of Kirk's mining camp or to contemplate Paxton's efforts to sabotage his rivals. Will the land continue to nurture its women and men when its lakes have been drained and its riverbanks denuded?

Durkin, however, appears unconscious of the irony embedded in his descriptions of development. Kirk assures Jule that Paxton "will never lay a hand on the water power of Ripple Creek" (194) while he is alive to prevent it, yet it is Kirk himself who plans to bring

power to the White Squaw, "enough power to work one of the biggest mines on this continent" (331) and Kirk who plans to drain half a lake so that he can excavate a new ore body. Durkin appears unconscious, too, of the irony in John Allen's decision to embark on "a course of action that would make him as strong a man as those who were coming in from the outside" (180) when this decision is what causes Paxton to destroy him. Both Allen and Mackay are happy with their isolated, primitive lives of freedom, yet both attempt to join, on equal terms, the development game. Jule recognizes the "unequal nature of the fight" (132) between her father and Paxton, and Mackay feels a sense of "his own helplessness" (178) when dealing with both Paxton and Tyne. Recognition of this inequality, of the fundamental injustice of a social hierarchy which grants strong men power at the expense of women, of Nature and of weaker men, does not deter Durkin from his endorsement of androcracy. The Lobstick Trail, like The Heart of Cherry McBain, is a tribute to the men who win the development game.

The victory of androcracy in both Durkin's novels is especially significant in light of the strength of his female characters. Cherry McBain, Anne McCartney, Jule Allen and Marion Curtis are all strong, courageous women who are able to make decisions and take action without the help of men. Yet all these women fail in part, while the male protagonists emerge clear victors of the field. Cherry, the most successful of the women, takes charge of her father's construction camp when he is incapacitated by alcohol and despair, but finally must enlist a man's help in order to save him. Anne succeeds in freeing McBain from his bondage to McCartney, but fails to win the hero's love. Jule challenges Paxton's right to destroy the beauty of the rapids on Ripple Creek, but eventually sacrifices this beauty in order to save Henry Tyne from destruction. Marion competes and works on terms of equal

power with men like Paxton and Tyne, but loses Kirk Brander to Jule Allen. These women do not suffer total defeat, as do villains Bill McCartney and Warren Paxton, but nor do they experience complete victory. King Howden and Kirk Brander, on the other hand, win their sweethearts' hands in marriage, conquer their rivals and achieve economic success. Although their victories owe much to the help of the women who love them, **they** wear the laurels at the end of the novels. Anne helps King defeat McCartney, then disappears while King enjoys marriage and pastoral bliss. Marion forces Kirk's rival to leave the country, then returns to her lonely life in the city while Kirk enjoys the management of his "great work" and the comfort of his "great love" (334). The rules of androcracy give victory not to strong women but to strong men who can harness the powerful forces of Nature and of woman's love.

Durkin's equation of railroad building and industrial expansion with human progress reflects the dominant ideology of a pioneer society bent on economic growth and development. Although the narrative voice recognizes that such "feminine" luxuries as beauty and grace have value, their importance pales beside the pragmatic utility of railroads and copper mines. That this view represents the interests of men at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy is understandable--popular fiction seldom challenges the norms and values of the most powerful segment of society. The critical reader of today, however, considering the impact of male-dominated development on women and Nature, deconstructs Durkin's novels and uses them to challenge his androcentric view of authority and power. Railroad construction in The Heart of Cherry McBain and copper exploitation in The Lobstick Trail are both a "man's game" in which the rules of play privilege the strong, the fearless and the ruthless above those who would love the land for its own sake and would share its wealth

and beauty in a "feminine" spirit of cooperation. Deconstructing these novels enables readers to see the patriarchal ideology embedded in the texts and to use their new perceptions as the basis for an alternative, ecofeminist view of development and power.

PART II

THE HOMSTEADING ROMANCE

Chapter Eight

Domestic Prosperity in the Homesteading Romance: Re-creating the Values of "Home"

> The most essential challenge for humanity is to learn to eat from nature's bounty without destroying it in the process, to find our appropriate niche within nature.
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> - Judith D. Soule and Jon K. Piper, Farming in Nature's Image: An Ecological Approach to Agriculture, 1992[1]

The prairie homesteading romance, like its wilderness counterpart, played a major role in the Europeanization of the Canadian West. Portraying in vivid tones the heroic struggle of settlers to convert a wasteland into wheatfields, its endorsement of economic progress as the greatest social good helped to shape the expectations and behavior of immigrants to this "new" land. Authors of the homesteading romance, imbued with the progressive spirit of boosterism, promoted the mercantile values that would make the West part of a prosperous nation and Empire. Their novels thus served as ideologically-motivated manuals which advised immigrants on appropriate responses to an unfamiliar land. In its narrow equation of success with prosperity, however, and in its dismissal of the oppositional norms of "foreigners," indigenous people and Nature, the homesteading romance provided a flawed guide to agricultural settlement. Its anthropocentric worldview failed to supply the

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[1]p. 228.

insights necessary for the creation of a new culture appropriate to the social and ecological conditions of the North American plains; implementation of its values resulted in the deterioration of prairie ecosystems and in a population shift away from farms and rural centres. Not until the close of the settlement period, when the novels of Martha Ostenso and Frederick Philip Grove revealed the spiritual poverty of Western materialism, did prairie writers critically analyze the values that they had imported from their "old world" home.

The domestic focus of the homesteading romance disguises the political nature of this form of popular fiction. Although its emphasis on home and family suggests that it is of primarily personal concern, representations of domestic life serve, as Nancy Armstrong notes, as "a cultural strategy arising from specific historical conditions and serving definite political ends" (48). The way in which prairie writers portray relationships between women and men, First Nations people and white folk, settlers and the land, "foreigners" and immigrants of British ancestry expresses an ideology that empowers one side at the expense of the other. The realistic nature of much domestic fiction gives readers the illusion that they can glimpse an objective picture of social reality within the pages of the text when what they see is the writer's **interpretation** of that reality. The homesteading novel's treatment of agricultural settlement, however realistic it appears to be, has ideological implications, for it proposes a particular version of that story. Its utopian vision, along with the immigration propaganda of a dominion government determined to settle its hinterland, helped to create and perpetuate a materialist image of the prairies as breadbasket of the West and fount of economic blessings for the individual, the nation and the British Empire.

Replacing the wilderness romance's picture of a pristine wilderness ripe for exploitation was the domestic romance's image of the West as prosperous utopia. Canada's

purchase of the North West from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870 and the subsequent construction of a railroad connecting the new territory to the rest of the Dominion opened the country to European settlement and thus made possible visions of a promised land in which immigrants could create "a perfect society" (Francis, R. Douglas 86). The grassy plains and verdant river valleys which the writers of wilderness romances admired as picturesque sites for future development were transformed, in the pages of the homesteading romance, into the prosperous farmsteads and golden wheatfields of an agricultural paradise.

The utopian images which drew European settlers to the great plains emphasised the natural wealth of a "virgin" land whose resources offered unlimited economic opportunity. The fertile soil, the parkland woods, the swift-flowing northern rivers and the untapped mineral deposits were depicted as riches waiting to be harvested by the eager hand of man. A passage from Charles Mair's The New Canada: Its Resources and Productions (1875) illustrates the narrowly utilitarian role that Nature plays in this vision of future prosperity and national greatness. Mair describes the wonders of the West in terms of their potential to support a flourishing, resource-based economy:

> An atmosphere of crystal, a climate suited above all others to develop the broad shoulder, the tense muscle, and the clear brain, and which will build up the most herculean and robust nation upon earth. Mighty rivers whose turbid streams drain half a continent, and bury themselves in the Northern Ocean. Measures of coal and iron, the sources of England's material greatness, and which will make any nation great which can use them aright, almost locked together. Above all, the hope of the despairing poor of the world, a boundless ocean of land, diversified by rolling hills, by lakes and woods, or swelling into

> illimitable plain. The haunt of the Indian, the bison, and the antelope, waiting with majestic patience for the flocks and the fields, the schools, the churches, the Christian faith and love of freedom of the coming men. (qtd. in Francis, R. Douglas 88)

The homesteading romance illustrates the realization of this dream of national greatness. In its portrayal of prosperous farmsteads and burgeoning communities built upon the wealth of a "boundless ocean of land," it both records and anticipates the agricultural development of the West.

Inherent in the novelist's vision of utopia, however, are contradictory impulses; the settler wants to create a beautiful garden in the wilderness, but he also wants to convert the wild lands to wheatfields. These conflicting images dominate the homesteading romance. As Leo Marx notes about the American pastoral, they express the contradiction between the idyllic rural society that settlers **said** they wanted and the pragmatic reality of ongoing industrial progress: "While the stock rhetoric affirmed a desire for a serene, contemplative life of pastoral felicity, the nation's industrial achievements were demonstrating to all the world its tacit commitment to the most rapid possible rate of technological progress, and to an unlimited buildup of wealth and power" (98). Homesteading novels abound with Edenic images of settlers living in harmony with domesticated Nature and, at the same time, with mechanical images of breaking the prairie sod, ploughing the land for spring planting and otherwise using machines that disrupt the tranquility of a rustic arcadia. Perhaps, as Joseph Meeker says, the increasing dominance of the machine has destroyed the garden, and with it hopes for realizing a "pastoral utopia of peace and purity" (88). Or, perhaps, the garden is incompatible with Nature itself. Since gardens do not exist in the natural world, but are the

product of machines used to manipulate Nature for human ends, the very concept of a garden points to the unique role that humans play in the biosphere. Meeker's judgement is harsh: "Pastoral values glorify anthropocentric agriculture and rigidly reject the possibility that nature has any independent integrity apart from man's imposed domestication" (90-1). Carolyn Merchant, working in an ecofeminist tradition, is equally severe in her indictment of the pastoral tradition. She suggests that the seductive imagery of a bountiful paradise enticed settlers to the "new" world and thus encouraged "the transformation and cultivation of the [American] wilderness." Immigrants sailed to North America in order to cultivate a garden in the wilderness, but all too often participated in the "disruption and exploitation" (20) of the very lands whose pastoral beauty they had intended to embrace. There is no evidence that romance novelists were aware of the irony in this situation. Their work is an unequivocal celebration of European achievement. In its validation of "progress" and economic success, the homesteading novel pays tribute to the women and men who conquered Nature and built an agricultural civilization in the prairie wilderness.

European settlers brought with them to the prairies an industrial market economy that privileged the production of surplus wealth above the self-sufficiency of indigenous cultures[2]. This economic system, rooted in the English political philosophy of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was based, as Mary Clark notes, upon a number of "arbitrary assumptions . . . : the inevitable competitiveness and selfishness of 'human nature' (Hobbes); the 'natural rights' of individuals to possessive ownership of their

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[2]Oppositional values existed not only in aboriginal cultures but also in the residual peasant cultures of Europe and in the writing of Victorian social critics such as William Morris, whose News From Nowhere (1885) rejects industrialisation and "progress" in favour of handcraft and the preservation of natural beauty.

labour and their property (Locke); the notion that economic self-interest automatically benefits the whole of society (Adam Smith); the tendency for the world to 'progress' (Darwin)" (275). These assumptions contributed to the development of a modern society whose primary social goal is "**efficiency** in the production and consumption of wealth" (Clark 277). Western immigrants, heirs of this economic tradition, regarded prosperity as a sign of moral progress. It is easy to see why their dominant quest in the pages of the homesteading romance is for economic success. Since wealth was an important source of status and power, the man with a half-section farm had to expand his acreage in order to obtain prestige in his local community. Prairie farmers thus became part of an economy based upon industrial expansion and increasing agricultural productivity. The homesteading novel, by uncritically portraying this Western view of progress, validated the commercial, export-oriented economy that rapidly replaced aboriginal self-sufficiency.

Although there were few oppositional voices expressing concern about the ecological costs of technological and economic progress, soil scientists in the early 1900s were beginning to question the long-term viability of prairie agriculture. Three articles in a history of the prairie provinces published in 1914 warn that prevalent agricultural practices are destroying the potential for sustainable crop production. J. W. Dafoe makes a connection between the growing prosperity of the West and the depletion of prairie soils: "Critics of the methods which are generally employed in the West charge that the soil, in place of being farmed, is 'mined' for wheat. The large yields and the ready market at good prices have made wheat-raising the quickest and easiest road to prosperity . . ." (316). His concern is echoed by W. J. Black, who notes in his study of Manitoba's economic resources that ". . . a system of farming that did not aim to conserve soil fertility or restore to the land those elements of

plant growth absorbed in grain-growing must, even on a soil so richly endowed by nature as Manitoba's, in time be a failure" (522). W. J. Rutherford comes to a similar conclusion in his study of Saskatchewan's resources. He cites data from a soil study at the Indian Head Dominion Experimental Farm which, its author says, "makes very clear that enormous losses of organic matter and nitrogen have followed upon the present method of continuously cropping with grain" (552). The study notes that failure to return organic matter to the soil and the practice of summerfallow have resulted in a loss of almost one-third of the nitrogen in soil which, at the time of the study, had been cultivated for only 22 years. Rutherford's summary of the problems that result from raising only wheat, barley and oats is instructive in its assessment of the impact of grain monocultures:

> The soil becomes impoverished of its humus, and hence is weakened in its soil-binding and water-holding properties. The soil drifts and leaves the seed and roots of plants uncovered. It dries out badly during periods of drought. Wherever wheat--or cereal--growing has been continued beyond a certain time without returning fertility, the yields have been diminished. Weeds such as wild oats, stinkweed, Canada thistle, sow thistle, and others multiply rapidly under the system of farming that is in vogue on too many farms. (579-80)

Rutherford optimistically notes that these evils will result in a "saner system" (580) of agriculture. Along with Dafoe and Black he advocates mixed farming as an antidote to the depletion of soil fertility; live-stock production and the raising of feed crops will restore nitrogen and organic matter to land exhausted by years of alternating summerfallow with wheat. Eighty years later, however, farming practices still reflect the preoccupation with

high-production, export-oriented grain production that has characterized the prairie economy since the days of the early homesteading romance.

Because ecocriticism looks at the relationship between literature and the environment, any discussion of the homesteading romance must consider the ecological impact of a genre which popularized the concept of farming as a profitable battle between man and Nature. Early prairie fiction cannot be held responsible for the massive disruption of soil ecosystems that resulted from the modernization of agriculture, but it did help to create a popular image of the successful farmer as a man relentless in his ambition to carve an agricultural empire from the wilderness. By idealizing this heroic struggle, the homesteading romance made the bold entrepreneur part of the myth of Western progress. Widespread soil degradation and habitat destruction are part of the legacy of this agrarian tradition. After barely one hundred years of crop production, prairie soil has experienced a 40-50% decrease in organic matter (Rennie and Ellis 52) and a dramatic decrease in nitrogen-- soils which originally released up to 125 pounds of nitrogen per acre now deliver as low as nine pounds per acre (Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture 46). Soil salinity affects about two million hectares of Prairie farmland and soil acidity (as a result of acidic precipitation and the continued application of nitrogen fertilizer) affects up to 1.8 million hectares (Anderon, Roppel and Gray 32-3). Wind erosion has affected an estimated 6.4 million hectares of farmland and water erosion occurs on an estimated 5 million hectares (Anderson, Roppel and Gray (30). The use of heavy farm machinery has resulted in extensive soil compaction which adversely affects growing conditions for plants. Demand for increased productivity has resulted in the destruction of plant and wildlife habitat; 1% of Canadian plant species are at serious risk and an additional 10% at some risk (Science

Council of Canada 17). Increased use of agricultural chemicals--prairie nitrogen fertilizer consumption alone jumped from 5.4 thousand tonnes in 1948 to 569.9 thousand tonnes in 1979 (Wilson 34)-- threatens the soil biota, creates pesticide-resistance in insects and pathogens and weed species, contaminates ground and surface water and poses a health risk to farmers and consumers (Soule and Piper 31-50). The problems which originated during the early days of Western agriculture clearly have not gone away, but have intensified to the point where they threaten its long-term sustainability.

The dramatic increase in farm productivity made possible by mechanization has, until recently, masked the consequences of unsustainable agricultural practices. Because crop production records continue to be high--an achievement made possible by the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and new crop varieties, as well as by technological changes in farm machinery-- farmers have been able to disregard the deterioration of soil ecosystems. By substituting the gasoline-driven internal combustion engine for the four-horse team, the aspiring farmer could increase both the size of his tillage and harvesting implements and the length of his working day. He thus could work more land than his less progressive counterpart and, at least in theory, could reap more wealth from its soil. A forty horsepower gasoline tractor can "haul eight gang-plows behind it," Chaddie McKail notes in Arthur Stringer's novel The Prairie Wife (1915). "In twenty-four hours it will be able to turn over thirty-five acres of prairie soil--and the ordinary man and team counts two acres of plowing a decent day's work" (139). Little wonder, then, that ambitious homesteaders replaced their horses with machines and that farm yields increased! This increased productivity, as the Hall Commission notes in a 1977 report, characterized the development of prairie agriculture: "Over the past 100 years, the change has been from a labour intensive, largely self-sufficient

farm unit where each farm worker produced enough food for himself and three to five other people to large scale capital intensive units where the farm worker produces enough for himself and 50 other persons" (quoted in Wilson 4). In spite of steadily decreasing numbers of people engaged in prairie grain farming since the 1930s, farm outputs have been steadily increasing--largely as a result of mechanization. In 1931 the prairie agricultural work force consisted of 442,000 people--49% of the people gainfully employed in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Ten years later the total had fallen to 420,000; by 1981 only 212,00 individuals were engaged in farming--a mere 10% of the prairie work force (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 517). During that same period the total value of prairie agricultural production increased from $119,668,000 in 1931 to $5,498,800,000 in 1981 (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 518-9)[3]. "The cause of the increase in [farm] productivity," Barry Wilson notes, "has been food producers' acceptance of technological advance, and a growing substitution of capital investment for labor. Machines have been replacing men on farms all across Canada, and nowhere is that trend more pronounced than on the Prairies" (19). Blinded by the meteoric brilliance of a growing economy and overflowing grain bins, both producers and consumers applauded the technological marvels that appeared to herald a golden age for prairie agriculture.

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[3]Statistics citing increased productivity per farm worker do not, however, tell the whole story. Frederick Philip Grove makes a good point when he questions the assertion that mechanized, Northern American agriculture is more efficient than European peasant agriculture. If we would count the vast number of people employed in the manufacture, sale and repair of implements and in the marketing and transportation of grain, he says, we would get very different figures: "If we divided the total yield of the country not by the number of our farmers alone, but by the number of all directly or indirectly employed in producing it, I wonder whether the yield per man would still exceed the yield per man in any but the poorest districts of Europe" ("Assimilation" 179).

Increased individual production, however, resulted in both decreased rural job opportunities and decreased net farm incomes. Although the number of prairie farms increased from 55.2 thousand in 1901 to 288.1 thousand in 1931--an increase accounted for by widespread immigration--the rural percentage of the population decreased from 75% to 62% during the same period (Fowke 72-3). Evidently urban job prospects were more attractive and/or more plentiful than were jobs on the farm. Not only did bigger farm machinery mean less need for farm labour, but higher production costs also meant less ability to pay the help that farmers did need. Like Jackson Stake's hired hand Bill in Robert Stead's Grain (1926), many a young man must have realized that he could not support a wife on farm wages. The national prosperity which the development of a Western wheat economy was designed to produce may indeed have reached bankers and implement dealers and real estate speculators, but little of it trickled down to farmers. Homesteaders, Vernon Fowke notes, had an abysmal record of success:

> Careful estimates place the acreage entered for on a homestead basis in western Canada in the period from 1870 to 1927 at 99 million acres and the corresponding patents, to 1930, at approximately 58.2 million. These data indicate a gap of over 40 per cent between expectation and fulfilment in the first critical phase of homesteading in Canada. In terms of human beings, four out of every ten Canadian homesteaders failed to "prove up," to secure title to their claim. (285)

Obviously the cost of farm inputs was only one factor in determining the high failure rate for homesteaders. Insufficient start-up capital, lack of experience, periodic drought, early frosts, the high cost of transporting grain to market and fluctuating wheat prices all threatened early

settlers with disaster. The cost of machinery and fuel was yet one more burden which they could ill afford to bear[4]. Although the establishment of the prairie wheat economy was "accompanied by tremendous expansion throughout the entire Canadian economy" (Fowke 70), its profits went to the manufacturing and farm service sectors rather than to primary producers. The industrialization of agriculture created additional needs for farm machinery, repairs and fuel, thus providing additional economic opportunities for business without substantially benefitting farmers.

Because energy supplies traditionally have been plentiful and cheap, farmers have been able to ignore the incredible inefficiency of a food system heavily dependent upon fossil fuels and mechanical labour. Along with increased volume of production per agricultural worker has come increased energy input per unit of food produced. Although production per worker increased approximately 70% between the mid-sixties and 1975, energy input per worker increased approximately 90%. "The reasons for the declining energy efficiency," Barry Wilson notes, "relate primarily to changes in farm practice during the two decades: farms became more mechanized, and farmers used increasing amounts of chemical inputs" (46). Machinery energy use alone increased by 93.3% during the twelve years between 1963 and 1975 (Wilson 47). Only the use of human energy--down 60.8%--declined as a result of increased mechanization. What this has done to the entire Western food system is staggering. Slightly more than two calories of energy are invested per calorie

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[4]Barry Wilson notes that although farm incomes fluctuated wildly between 1956 and 1976, farm operating expenses consistently increased during the same period. In spite of higher gross incomes and the increased value of their assets, he says, farmers have "consistently lost ground" (62) in their struggle for financial security. Although I cannot cite statistics to support my postion, I suggest that this situation pre-dates 1956.

of food obtained for all agricultural production in the United States[5] (Lovins et al. 68), and the low labour requirement for prairie agriculture makes it unlikely that the ratio is appreciably better in the Canadian West. Modern, industrialized agriculture makes very heavy demands on the environment and on the non-renewable fossil fuel that lies beneath the earth's crust.

Given these horrendous costs, there is cause to lament the absence of aboriginal and Métis voices in homesteading fiction. There are no spokespeople for a wilderness culture or for self-sufficiency agriculture in these popular, romantic novels by Canadian, British and American writers. The few Indians who appear are a "miserable lot" (90) in Alexander Begg's "Dot It Down;" A Story of Life in the North-West (1871), greedy villains or drink-maddened alcoholics in James Morton's Polson's Probation: A Story of Manitoba (1897) or eccentric outcasts, as is the old Indian man in Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart (1923). Half-breeds fare little better. Nina Stone, daughter of a prosperous Métis family in Begg's "Dot It Down", is the only mixed-blood character who plays a significant role in a homesteading novel. This estimable young woman displays admirable qualities, but they consist primarily in her ability to adopt her husband's upper-class British background. Homesteading novelists, for the most part, portray a prairie landscape peopled with immigrant representatives of European traditions. Their failure to incorporate aboriginal and Métis cultures into Anglo-Canadian society illustrates the more general failure of English-speaking settlers to learn from the earlier inhabitants of the North West plains.

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[5]When the energy used for processing, distribution and preparation is added, total energy cost is about 9.8 calories of energy per calorie of food consumed in the United States (Lovins et al. 68).

Métis culture offered immigrants the possibility of blending "old world" values and traditions with the cultural practices of indigenous people. In its emphasis upon the sanctity of the natural world, as Stan Rowe notes, it suggested an appropriate way in which new settlers could relate to an unfamiliar country[6]:

> The Metis culture that flourished briefly in Manitoba and then in Saskatchewan in the 1800s was a partnership, a synthesis, an adaptation forging equality between the native and the immigrant cultures. It remains a metaphor of the way we ought to live, not only with one another but with the land, with the Indian consciousness of its organic aliveness and its spirituality. Among other things, the half-breed culture could teach us again that the earth is sacred, that divinity has never left it and that we do wrong when we heedlessly tear it apart and destroy it. (Home Place 155)

Instead of adapting their way of life to the social and ecological constraints of the "new" land, European settlers recreated the institutions and cultural practises of their homelands. In the process, they rejected the indigenous traditions of Métis and First Nations people. The resulting prairie culture is spiritually divorced both from the land and from its social origins. Cultural authenticity, as George Melnyk points out, is rooted in a sense of identification with people and place. By deliberately replacing native culture with an imitative, colonial culture "subservien[t] to an imperial centre" (41), he says, western Canadians have lost an opportunity to develop an authentic concept of self in harmony with their origins: "A whole people's consciousness of itself is repressed ... when its identity is determined elsewhere,

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[6]Dick Harrison makes esssentially the same point in Unnamed Country (18).

when it comes from without rather than from within. A culture is inauthentic when it is an expression of the other, rather than the self" (43). Clearly the replacement of European traditions with the traditions of the Cree or Blackfoot Nations would have represented an unacceptable denial of European social origins. Cultural authenticity, however, demands accommodation to geographical place as well as to historical past. Traditional Métis culture, by blending the domestic and agricultural practices of European immigrants with the spiritual traditions of indigenous peoples, could have provided a model for a sustainable way of life in harmony with the prairie environment. That it failed to do so is one of the tragedies of prairie history.

Since the Anglo-Canadian homesteading romance is overwhelmingly Eurocentric, we must turn to the pages of a French-Canadian novel for the only significant study of Métis culture in early prairie fiction. The primary conflict in Georges Bugnet's Nipsya (1924; trans. 1929) is between the European and the Métis way of life. Set against the political background of the Resistance of 1885, it is outwardly a domestic tale of a young woman's adolescence and marriage. Nipsya, brought up by her Cree grandmother, loves both her cousin Vital Lajeunesse and the white factor of the local Hudson's Bay Company post. As a result, she feels torn between two cultural traditions:

> She was no longer sure which was to be preferred: her country of lakes and forests, where scattered human beings worshipped hidden powers and led a rude and simple life; or the old crowded nations who destroyed Nature to make room for their ambitious structures of stone and steel, in a perpetual, awful conflict, a conflict wherein cries of lamentation mingled with songs of triumph, but which was so impressive in the majesty of its endeavour. (205)

Nipsya's marriage to Vital signals the author's commendation of a Métis culture that bridges the Indian's and the white settler's world. The plot and narrative viewpoint express admiration not so much for the hunter and trapper and voyageur as for the Métis farmer whose livelihood was equally threatened by encroaching civilization. Bugnet is unique amongst early prairie writers not only for his sympathetic account of Métis grievances but also for his sympathetic description of a way of life that blended aboriginal self-sufficiency with the settled, agricultural life of immigrant peoples.

Vital Lajeunesse's farm bears little resemblance to the commercial enterprises described in the homesteading romance. His vegetables, grain crops and animals meet the food needs of his family and, only secondarily, provide the necessary money for his few purchases. Unlike the vast acres of the romantic hero of Anglo-Canadian fiction, they do not make him rich or powerful. The narrator's description of the farm emphasizes small scale and self-reliance rather than the land's potential to generate either wealth for the farmer or food for a hungry nation:

> To the south-east was the hen-house, built of logs, where the barred Plymouth Rocks roosted at night after being scattered in all directions since sunrise; and beside it was the pig-pen, where twelve little black pigs were being fattened on boiled barley, vegetables, and wild peas. . . .
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> . . . fifteen cows . . . lay peacefully chewing the cud, protected from the flies by the acrid smoke from the smudge--a smouldering fire of half-rotten wood covered with a layer of fresh straw-manure: it was enclosed by a triple row of poles with a strong stake at the four corners, to keep the animals from scorching their feet. Five young oxen, not yet trained to the yoke, fled at

> Nipsya's approach. . . . The horses, less sensitive to the flies, were grazing under some young poplars, not far away.
>
> The stable, due south of the big white house and almost as large, echoed with the blows of Vital's axe as he made the last stall of strong poplar poles. Nipsya looked on with interest for a long time, meanwhile admiring the floor, made with poplars split in two and placed side by side with the flat side uppermost, also the ceiling, fashioned like the floor and supporting the hayloft. . . .
>
> South-west of the house, there was a three-walled building that . . . served as winter-quarters for the oxen and the sheep.
>
> North of this building, the garden stretched to the steep lake bank. It occupied almost two acres and was well-fenced with poplar poles, superposed in zig-zag fashion, with the ends one on top of another, this arrangement requiring neither stakes nor nails. Several tillings had made the good, black, sandy soil very light. Two-thirds of it was reserved for barley, the remainder for vegetables, including potatoes. (101-2)

By naming the breed of Vital's chickens, listing the foods fed to his pigs and describing the arrangement for keeping the animals from scorching their feet on the smudge fire, Bugnet indicates his familiarity with the practical details of prairie agriculture. Unlike most novelists, he was a farmer. Born in France, he immigrated to an area north of Edmonton and farmed there for the next fifty years. Nipsya reveals his respect both for the land and for the Métis people of his new home place. The novel also validates peasant-style agriculture. Vital's small, diversified farm provides meat, vegetables and grain for his family and feed for

his livestock. When he and his father break additional ground in order to seed some oats, barley and "a little wheat," he does so in order to be "less at the mercy of the Hudson's Bay traders" (129-30). Poplar trees provide fuel for heating as well as material for building fences, sheds and houses. Fish in the nearby lake and wild game in the forest supplement his food supply, and further reduce his need for money. This independent, self-sufficient way of life is "free and sweet" (263) to Nipsya, heroine of the novel, and to the man whom she marries. In his matter-of-fact account of their work and simple pleasures, Bugnet affirmed an oppositional culture. That his writing failed to inspire other alternative ways of viewing the relationship between farmers and the land helps to account for the commercial direction of prairie agricultural development.

In the absence of a body of oppositional fiction, critical theory discloses the ideological limitations of the Eurocentric homesteading romance. Ecocriticism suggests that the late-twentieth-century breakdown of ecological systems is not a phenomenon that appeared out of nowhere, but is a natural consequence of power relationships established during the settlement era. By allowing only narrowly defined human interests to determine the direction of prairie society, European settlers disempowered both Nature and the First Nations people who accommodated their lives to its dictates. Ecocriticism allows the reader to see the dark side of progress; it reveals the shadows of injustice and ecological destruction hidden behind the "affirmative pronouncements" (Eagleton, The Significance of Theory 33) of the text. It makes it possible for the reader to recognize and understand the power imbalances which permitted European settlers to exploit the natural resources of the great plains at the cost of destroying trees, prairie grasslands, buffalo and indigenous people.

Behind the boosterism of the homesteading romance lies the basis for a critical

evaluation of agricultural development. The remaining chapters in Part Two will explore six themes that emerge from a deconstructive reading of this genre. Chapter Nine will consider the social and ecological impact of two novels--Alexander Begg's "Dot It Down;" A Story of Life in the North-West and W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother- which served as guidebooks to the immigrant settler. Chapter Ten will use the prairie novels of Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphrey Ward to examine the anthropocentric roots of the ideology which equates wealth and expanding farm size with moral progress. Chapter Eleven will look at the treatment of the ethnic "other" in four novels of assimilation: Ralph Connor's The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan, Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows: A Story of the Alberta Foothills, E. Antony Wharton Gill's Love in Manitoba and Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart. Chapter Twelve will explore the ecological impact of farm mechanization in R. C. Stead's Grain. Chapter Thirteen will examine the feminine quest for community in Arthur Stringer's Prairie trilogy, Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese and the novels of Nellie McClung. Finally, Chapter fourteen will look at Frederick Philip Grove's use of comedy and tragedy to explore similar quests in Settlers of the Marsh and Our Daily Bread.

The homesteading novel, like the wilderness romance, was a conservative genre which privileged the dominant worldview of Anglo-Canadian immigrants at the expense of indigenous people and wild Nature. Blind to the merits of oppositional cultures, it reflected and embellished the Western ideology of economic progress. The homesteading romance thus influenced the development of prairie society along the lines traced by a materialistic, essentially British civilization. Although later writers such as Martha Ostenso and Frederick Philip Grove criticized the spiritual blindness of a people obsessed with wealth and

possessions, most novelists turned out works that glorified the settler's economic mission. By equating success with conquest and dominion, the homesteading romance helped to maintain a Eurocentric culture that sacrificed indigenous traditions and the integrity of Nature for the over-riding goal of financial success.

Chapter Nine

"Farming for Profit": Advice to the Homesteader in "Dot It Down" and The Letters of A Remittance Man to His Mother

> We should assume . . . that any foreign market for food ought to be temporary and, therefore, by definition, not dependable. The best thing for any nation or people, obviously, is to grow its own food, and therefore charity alone would forbid us to depend on or to wish for a permanent market for our agricultural products in any foreign country.
>
> - Wendell Berry, Home Economics, 1987[1]

One of the roles played by the homesteading romance was that of unofficial immigration agent for the West. By gilding the stories of European settlers with the glow of financial success, it enticed to its vast open spaces the adventurous, the ambitious and the poor. N'er-do-well remittance men, younger sons tempted by the lure of fortune, American and Canadian farmers seeking cheap new land on the fertile plains, landless peasants and poverty-stricken workers from the towns and cities of western Europe--their emigration to the Canadian interior accounted for the dramatic increase in prairie population from 43,000 in 1871 to 2,354,000 in 1931 (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 511). The homesteading romance encouraged this massive transfer of population by depicting the prairies as an enormous, untilled wheatfield which promised prosperity to enterprising sons and daughters of the "old"

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[1]p. 124.

country willing to seek their fortunes on farms and ranches in the West. Although its failure to acknowledge government policies and trade practices which favoured Eastern business interests helped to encourage unrealistic expectations of wealth, it also helped guide the farmer to genuine financial success. Novels like Alexander Begg's "Dot It Down;" A Story of Life in the North-West (1871) and W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother (1908) acted as manuals which provided advice on farming for profit. "Dot It Down" gives the prospective immigrant practical information on a variety of topics from the condition of roads and bridges to the process of cutting hay and preparing for winter. Set in the reassuring context of a law-abiding country in which good order reigns, it provides in the persons of Mr. Meredith and George Wade models of the shrewd, careful farmer destined to "get ahead." The Letters of a Remittance Man warns English settlers about the dangers of pride, sloth, confidence men and strong drink, and extols the virtues of thrift, hard work and the adoption of "Canadian" ways. Both novels thus served as guidebooks to successful commercial agriculture on the prairies.

Although prairie farming in 1871 was still based entirely on the production of food for local consumption, by the time Jarvis's novel was published in 1908 agriculture played an important role in Canada's mercantile economy. The earlier economy of the North West under Hudson's Bay Company rule, not surprisingly, was dominated by the fur trade. J. W. Dafoe, in his "Economic History of the Prairie Provinces, 1870-1913", describes the region in 1870 as a "vast waste upon which human activities, save in a few isolated localities, had made no mark" (283). Farming was confined to the Red River area and a few other settlements. From 1813, when the Red River settlers sowed their first crops, to the first exportation of wheat from that area in 1876, a handful of farmers met the food needs of

settlers, fur trade employees and other inhabitants of the prairies. In 1876, however, when wheat yielded a record 32.5 bushels to the acre and western Canadian farmers enjoyed an unprecedented harvest of 480,000 bushels, Higgins and Young of Winnipeg exported to Steele Brothers in Toronto the first shipment of Red River wheat--857 bushels of No. 1 Hard (Dafoe 294-5). During the next thirty years wheat production on the prairies increased rapidly. In 1900, with 1,870,260 acres seeded to wheat, western Canadian farmers harvested 17,053,546 bushels; twelve years later the seeded acreage had increased to 9,286,000 and the total yield to 188,279,000 bushels (Dafoe 317-21). By 1929 a total of 24.3 million acres of farmland were seeded to wheat, and farmers (with an average yield of only 11.6 bushels an acre) harvested 281.7 million bushels in the West (Fowke 75). Long before this time the prairies, which produced more than 90% of Canadian wheat, had become a major exporter: "Shipments abroad increased from small amounts in the 1890's till by the end of the First World War they were the largest single export in terms of dollar value. Wheat and flour exports yielded $10.9 million in 1901, $377.5 million in 1921, and $495 million in 1929. Canada exported more than a million bushels of wheat a day on the average in 1921 . . ." (Fowke 74). By 1914 Canada was one of the four major wheat exporters of the world (Fowke 178). By 1928 Canadian wheat sales constituted "nearly half the world export market" (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 301). Prairie agriculture had become a major contributor to the Canadian economy and a major participant in the global world of international trade.

Begg's treatment of the homesteading experience[2] anticipates the development of a

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[2]Since this novel was written before the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 offered free homesteads to settlers, the Merediths and George Wade purchase the land which they subsequently farm.

commercial, export-oriented prairie agriculture. The Red River Settlement which provides the setting for his novel proved to be, as Friesen notes, a "harbinger of British and European industrial capitalist conventions" (Canadian Prairies 66) in its introduction of commercial agriculture to the West. Viewing the prairies as the breadbasket of the world, settlers saw their role more as profit-oriented food purveyors for an Empire than as caretakers of the land and provisioners of food for domestic consumption. Rapidly expanded production meant that by the outbreak of the war Canadian farmers could supply grain to people in far-flung corners of the world. Since Begg's novel is set in the "present" of the late 1860s when prairie agriculture was still in its infancy, the primary focus is on establishing a prosperous farm (rather than on expanding farm size and output, as it is in the later novels of Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphry Ward). Begg, however, helped set the stage for "industrial capitalist conventions" in his description of an early prairie agriculture which offered wealth to hardworking and ambitious settlers.

As in virtually all homesteading romances, the object of the quest in "Dot It Down" is "success." The Meredith family leave their farm in Ontario and move to the North West in search of greater opportunity. En route they become friends with George Wade, a young man who also seeks his fortune in the West. Although the main thrust of the novel traces their progress toward a common goal, prosperity on a Red River farm, two sub-plots complement this tale of achievement. A bitter-sweet love story adds romantic interest and, in its conclusion, symbolizes the hero's assimilation into the culture of his new home. The second sub-plot, which focuses on the controversy which surrounded the transfer of the North West from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada, provides a political context for the novel and emphasizes the importance of law and social order. Both

the domestic and the political stories, in their joint commitment to the future of what will soon be Manitoba, establish a secure, comfortable milieu which makes possible the protagonists' ultimate financial success.

That part of "Dot It Down" which tells the story of the Meredith family's purchase and development of a Red River farm bears a remarkable similarity to the pages of an immigrant settler's manual. Much of the content of the novel, indeed, supplements the information which Begg provides in the 12-page "Emigrant's Guide to Manitoba" which he appends to his fictional work[3]. The "Emigrant's Guide" discusses the fertility of the land and the character of the country, describes the climate, tells prospective settlers how to get to Manitoba and what to take with them, discusses the abundant economic opportunities of the North West, explores the process of taking up land and describes the cost of merchandise which the settler will need to purchase in order to establish a homestead. The novel fleshes out these facts with information on topics ranging from the fur trade to the social life of Red River. Much of this description has nothing to do with the storyline of the novel, but it is pertinent to Begg's literary intent. It encourages settlement in the Red River area by convincing prospective immigrants that they would be able to live comfortably in this strange, primitive outpost of the civilized world. The author's detailed description of the trip from St. Paul to Red River, for example, enables Ontario farmers to bridge immaginatively the distance that separates them from the Manitoba plains and thus makes the prospect of the long and arduous trip less intimidating. His discussion of legal administration under the

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[3]As a Manitoba businessman, and deputy treasurer of Manitoba from 1878 to 1884, Begg had a strong interest in the economic growth and prosperity of the new province. This interest was doubtlessly increased by his work as general immigration agent of the CPR in England for several years.

Hudson's Bay Company emphasizes the existence of law and order in the North West and thus enables would-be settlers to contemplate a home there without concern for life or property. Even his description of a buffalo hunt and of the preparation of meat--skinning the buffalo, cutting it up and making pemmican--serves the practical purpose of convincing the inhabitants of civilization that the wild prairies offer them abundant resources to meet their needs[4].

Of greater relevance to the major plot of the novel is Begg's account of agriculture and its excellent prospects in Manitoba. Mr. Meredith's purchase and operation of a Red River farm enables the narrator to describe the prosperity of Settlement farmers and the opportunity that exists in both grain production and the raising of livestock. The Merediths

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[4]A comparison of Begg's description of a buffalo hunt with comparable descriptions in the wilderness romance reveals an important difference in the way early prairie writers viewed wild Nature. His matter-of-fact description divests the buffalo hunt of glamour and gives it the dull, pragmatic appeal of livestock slaughter:

> The [buffalo] . . . had faced round, and remained watching the approach of the horsemen, as if in surprise at their appearance. A band of plain hunters usually keep together until the buffalo turn and take flight, then the word to start is given, and each rider makes a dash wherever he sees the best chance of obtaining shots that will pay. It was so in this instance; the band had approached to within three or four hundred yards, when the bulls were observed to paw the ground and curve their tails. Immediately afterwards the whole herd took flight, and the hunters dashed away in hot pursuit. It was like the shock of an earthquake; the ground literally trembled; and the clouds of dust that arose, hid both riders and game from view; but loud above the din could be heard shots in every direction in quick succession, showing that the slaughter was going on. As the dust cleared away, in the rear of the merciless hunters, the plain was strewn with the carcases of the buffalo killed in the chase. (263)

Begg's buffalo are not noble beasts as they are in Butler's Red Cloud, not malevolent animals hostile to settlement as in Collins's The Rebel Chief (and Annette the Métis Spy), not savage opponents that must be conquered as in Laut's Lords of the North and not insensate obstacles to law and order as in Sinclair's Raw Gold. Rather, they are a source of food for plains hunters and their families. This utilitarian function is emphasized by the ensuing treatment of buffalo carcases as meat to be processed for human consumption.

soon note that most of the houses in the area are neat and clean and that "the farms around them appeared in good condition, well cultivated and fenced in" (82). This observation is strengthened by Mr. Meredith's subsequent visits to comfortable Settlement homes during the course of a cattle-buying expedition. The source of the settlers' general wealth and comfort, the narrator implies, is a resource-rich country hospitable to ambitious farmers. He learns that Grosse Isle is "particularly adapted for stock raising, having a good supply of water, with every facility for collecting hay, and sufficient wood land to serve for a shelter to the cattle from the hot rays of the sun in summer, and severity of the weather in winter" (197). He also discovers that the area is suited to vegetable and wool production, as well as to the production of barley, oats and wheat. Since, as the narrator tells us, ". . . thousands of acres are lying waste for want of cultivation . . ." (289), lack of human ambition is the only limitation on the agrarian development of the country. Even grasshoppers, that plague of new settlements, will disappear as the perennial grasslands vanish and the country "settles up" (344). Mr. Meredith and sons prosper, George Wade settles happily on a neighbouring farm--and the narrator is eloquent about the advantages that the Red River area offers. He points out that, unlike Ontario farmland, the plains do not need to be cleared of trees; all one has to do is plough the land, harrow it and then put in the crop. "So rich is the land that you do not require to use manure at all," he tells the reader, "and the second year your farm is in as good order as you ever will get it" (348-9). He concludes his panegyric with an invitation to Canadian farmers:

> We say, therefore, to the farmers of Canada, come here, where you may enjoy all the benefits of prairie farming, without the necessity for changing your allegiance, as you might have to do were you to emigrate to the Western

> States--and when you come to Red River, if you find the land taken up along the river banks, go back on the prairie, there you can dig a well almost anywhere and find water; and you can always find wood enough for your household purposes within a reasonable distance from your farm. (349)

This passage, key to the author's literary intent, makes explicit the nature of Begg's novel. "Dot It Down" is immigration propaganda[5] designed to encourage agricultural settlement in the Red River area. As such, it serves a function similar to Nicholas Flood Davin's aptly-named pamphlet, Homes for Millions: The Resources of the Great Canadian North-West, The Reasons Why Agriculture is Profitable There and Why Farmers Are Prosperous and Independent, published by the Dominion Government in 1892 in order to promote emigration to the Canadian interior.

Davin's pamphlet provides many reasons why prospective settlers should emigrate to the North West. As editor and owner of the Regina Leader and pamphleteer for the CPR, Davin doubtlessly saw that settlement would advance his own career, but he also realized that the sparsely-populated plains offered advantages to immigrants. In Homes for Millions he describes the prairies' rich resources and their suitability for agricultural settlement. He was joined in this endeavour by Charles Mair, whose "General Description of the North-West" introduces Davin's publication. After ennumerating the aesthetic and economic resources of the country, noting the importance of the railways and praising the "law-abiding condition" (18) of the Territories, Mair concludes that the Canadian interior offers the intending settler "no common inducement" to make the prairies his home:

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[5]I do not use this word in a pejorative sense; whether propaganda is "good" or "bad" often depends entirely on whether or not the reader agrees with it.

> When he considers the ease with which farming operations may be carried on, the adaptedness of the country to machinery, the absence of stumps and stones, rendering the whole breadth of surface available, the superior quality of the wheat produced and its prodigal yield--and then bears in mind that the coming outlet by Hudson's Bay will reduce railway transport to eastern conditions--he will clearly appreciate how strong an influence these facts should exercise upon his choice. (19)

It is easy to imagine how tempting this prospect of comfort and prosperity must have been to the landless poor and to the ambitious middle-class. Free homesteads offered independence and security to impoverished European tenant farmers and to factory workers and labouring men from the towns and cities of Britain. They offered an opportunity for wealth or for an easier life to Ontario farmers struggling to clear bush land with an axe and to Americans facing high land prices in a settled country. Mair and Davin appeal not so much to human greed as to the desire for comfort and financial security. Davin's assurance that he has visited farms in every part of Assiniboia, yet never encountered a situation where he "did not find plenty" (21), provides good reason for the poor to emigrate. And as if that personal inducement were not sufficient to persuade "the Farmer and Farm Labourer to enter and possess the land," he appeals to them to participate in "the serious noble pleasure of aiding in building up a new country, affecting the course of the world around, and effecting something for your fellow men" (108). Emigration would thus serve the dual purpose of advancing one's own fortunes and the general well-being of humankind.

The problem with Davin's and Begg's enthusiasm for rural settlement, however, is its equation of human well-being with the general good. Their anthropocentrism blinds them to

any negative impact of imposing Western agricultural civilization on the natural world. Davin was right when he said that the immigrant would assist in "affecting the course of the world around," but he had no way of knowing that the new course would lead to the loss of soil organic matter, increasing soil salinity and acidification, wind and water erosion and a growing dependence on petro-chemical fertilizers and pesticides[6]. By emphasizing the profit-oriented nature of "new world" farming, writers like Begg, Davin and Mair helped create economic expectations that could be satisfied only by an industrial model of agriculture. The ensuing transition of farming from food production to commodity production led to the present abusive pattern of land use: "The early insinuation into Prairie agriculture of the idea of farming as a **commercial enterprise**, as a business rather than as a provisioner of food for domestic consumption," Stan Rowe notes, "lies at the root of the exploitive land uses that continue to plague the West today" (Home Place 17). Farmers determined to wrest as much profit as possible from the soil became far more concerned with increasing production than with maintaining soil fertility. Sustained agriculture, however, means "maintenance first--attending to the health of soil, water, plants and animals--ahead of attention to yield and production" (Rowe, Home Place 172). Since this constraint would eliminate the possibility of export-oriented grain production, which (given 1990s prices) requires large scale and high yields in order to give the farmer even a small profit, it would require a radically different concept of agriculture than the resource-extractive view of today. Certainly Begg, writing in 1869 or 1870, cannot be held responsible for the development of agri-business. The small, non-mechanized "organic" farms of the Red River which he

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[6]I discuss this impact of agriculture in Chapter 10.

describes are models of sustainability in comparison to the factory farms that gradually replaced them. "Dot It Down" is important, however, because it introduces the concept of commercial agriculture. Begg's novel is the first western Canadian homesteading romance, and it sets the tone of economic pragmatism for the romances which follow.

Although novelists like Begg and Jarvis participated in the Western immigration campaign by depicting the Canadian prairies as a source of virtually limitless agricultural wealth, the drive to populate the West with enterprising farmers was motivated more by the promise of prosperity for Eastern manufacturers, the CPR and the increasingly powerful business interests that followed the settlers West than it was by a concern for the financial well-being of the women and men who settled the plains. The major beneficiaries of the campaign were not the farmers, but the businessmen who supplied them with goods and services and who bought and processed their agricultural products. The prairie wheat economy which was a goal of Canadian immigration policy, as Vernon Fowke notes in The National Policy and the Wheat Economy, was established to meet the needs of the business community. Canadian leaders in the 1850s and 1860s recognized that earlier periods of expansive prosperity "had been characterized most prominently by an abundant immigration and agricultural settlement" (10); settlers provided business opportunities for local suppliers, transportation companies and other economic interests. Settlement of the North West would provide another major influx of wealth into the national economy. Its impact, as Fowke notes, permeated far beyond the boundaries of the prairie region into the economic blood of the Canadian nation:

> The establishment of the wheat economy required the assembly in the prairie provinces of a massive structure of capital equipment without which the large-

> scale production and marketing of wheat would have been impossible. This included not only the equipment of the farms but also the equally indispensable equipment of the market centres throughout the region and of the transportation routes between. Each one of the hundreds of thousands of new farm units in the prairie provinces had to be provided with buildings . . . a complete if variable set of farm machinery . . . and, in addition, a wide variety of incidental capital such as household furnishings, fencing materials, pumps, windmills, and hand tools. The marketing of farm produce and the purchase of equipment and supplies by the farming population required thousands of miles of additional railway structure and hundreds of new market centres, each of the latter equipped with sidings, elevators, and loading platforms, warehouses and stores, and housing for the local residents. (71-2)

The enormous capital investment by settlers and entrepreneurs gave a major boost to the Canadian economy and resulted in the creation of unprecedented new wealth. "All parts of the Dominion with the exception of the maritime provinces expanded their industrial and other economic activity in direct response to the opening of the prairie market" (Fowke 72). Railroad barons, real estate dealers and speculators on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange were only a few of the many investors who made fortunes virtually overnight. Canada experienced an economic boom based upon agricultural settlement and expansion; part of the lure which enticed the settlers who made this prosperity possible were novels such as "Dot It Down" and The Letters of a Remittance Man.

Although Begg could not have anticipated the development of technological innovations that made farming increasingly dependent upon machinery suppliers and a

powerful petro-chemical industry, his novel serves the business interests of his own time by encouraging emigration to Manitoba. Even the melodramatic love story complements his tale of agricultural settlement by further validating farm life in the Red River area. George Wade and Grace Meredith fall in love with each other and plan to marry, but they are thwarted by rumours of a disgraceful affair in George's past. When he insists that he cannot honourably divulge that portion of the story which would clear his name, Mr. Meredith forbids their engagement and Wade, in despair, takes a Hudson's Bay Company post in the interior. Grace pines for him until, on his return to Red River, Mr. Meredith finally allows the lovers to marry. Grace's health, however, continues to decline and she dies, thus freeing George for a symbolically-important subsequent marriage to the daughter of a prosperous half-breed family, the Stones. The narrator says approvingly that the Stone family "had grown with the country, and when we meet them they possessed money invested abroad, and had a large and well cultivated farm in the settlement, which yielded them a handsome yearly competence" (335). This prosperity makes them respectable, and allows George to marry Nina. His union with this half-breed daughter of the country symbolizes his commitment to the Red River Settlement. Although he returns with his bride to England because his father's health is failing, Red River has become his home. After his father's death they return to Manitoba, rejecting the alternative possibilities of remaining in England or settling on the property in Scotland which Grace has left him. George buys a Red River farm and becomes one of the settlers whose toil contributes to the growing prosperity of the country.

The remaining plot element of "Dot It Down" that validates agricultural settlement is the story of the machinations surrounding the transfer of the North West from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada. Begg, author of four historical works on the

North West, uses this part of his novel to explore some of the events which led to the Métis resistance of 1870. At the same time he assures prospective settlers that Manitoba is, indeed, a safe place in which to live. Like Charles Mair, who tells the readers of Homes for Millions that ". . . life and property are safer [in the Canadian Territories] than in any portion of the United States or the easter [sic] Provinces of the Dominion" (18-19), Begg insists on the essentially law-abiding nature of the North West. By concluding his tale of political agitation with the victory of law and order, he helps to convince would-be emigrants to make their home in Manitoba.

Conflict in the plot centres on the activities of three factions: that which supports Canadian annexation of the North West, that which supports American annexation and that which is satisfied with Hudson's Bay rule. Begg, however, does not endorse the position of either the Canadian or the Hudson's Bay side so much as he supports political stability and the orderly, responsible transfer of power. Although he is not opposed to the sale of the North West to Canada he insists, in the words of the self-serving Mr. Whirl, that the settlers are happy and contented under Hudson's Bay control: "It is only men like ourselves who stir up things with a long pole, to bring fish to their own net, who preach dissatisfaction and sow the seeds of discontent" (106). Mr. Whirl and Mr. Cool, independent fur-traders and villains of the novel, urge political reformation for their own benefit; believing that annexation is inevitable and convinced that the winners will reward the men who assist them to victory, they privately agree to support different sides. Whoever backs the ultimate purchaser of the North West will share his spoils with the other man. They are joined in their effort to foment dissatisfaction by "Dot It Down," an arrogant Eastern journalist who uses his pen to support Canadian annexation. Mr. Meredith, however, believes that the people are happy under

existing Hudson's Bay Company rule, and therefore refuses to join either faction. His position is supported by the narrative voice, which points out the "falsities and absurdities" (163) in anti-Hudson's Bay Company rhetoric; articles in the pro-Canadian local newspaper are designed to "mislead public opinion abroad, so as to raise a cry for the deliverance of the 'Nor'Westers' from their so-called yoke" (164). The narrator insists that settlers in the North West have no cause for dissatisfaction: ". . . in reality a freer people did not live on the face of the earth" (165). Begg is not opposed to Canadian annexation of the North West; he is opposed to the lawlessness of people like Cool and Whirl, who unjustly attack lawful authority:

> Had Cool and his party endeavoured to lead the settlers to demand in a proper way annexation to Canada, without trying at the same time to blacken the character of the Hudson Bay Company, it is very probable that Canada would have found more friends than it did in Red River. There was no objection to a union with Canada amongst the people, but when men who represented themselves as champions of Canada defied the laws and endeavoured to bring mob violence into existence, then the settlers took fright, and without waiting to judge properly, they denounced all Canadians on account of the acts done by a few lawless men. (321-2)

Since agricultural settlement is Begg's primary concern in "Dot It Down", he is understandably opposed to any action that would frighten prospective residents. Cool's and Whirl's villainy consists not in their opposition to Hudson's Bay rule nor in their advocacy of annexation, but in their disregard for the law and for duly-constituted forms of protest. It consists, ultimately, in their disservice to the cause of prairie settlement.

When word comes to Red River that a deputation from Canada has gone to England to make arrangements for the purchase of the North West from the Hudson's Bay Company, Cool and "Dot" transfer their villainy to another sphere of action--they "buy" from the Indians huge tracts of land lived on by Métis people and plan to sub-divide it into plots for sale to prospective settlers from Canada. This unscrupulous disregard for the rights of local people causes considerable bad feeling in the Red River community. Although the narrator does not refer directly to the resistance of 1870, his discussion of local dissatisfaction focuses on some of the grievances that led to it:

> This selfish and unprincipled behavior on the part of such men as Cool and his friends did a great deal of harm, and sowed the seeds of future trouble in the settlement. In fact, it became generally believed amongst a large number of the settlers that they were to be ignored, and that strangers were to be allowed to come into the country and do as they pleased; and that Canada's whole aim in endeavouring to obtain possession of the country was to find a place of refuge for its surplus population, and that the interest of the Red River people were to suffer thereby. (329)

Insecurity of land tenure became one of the important issues that led to Métis resistance. Because the Canadian government, which took over administration of the North West in 1870, failed to guarantee Métis land titles, the rights of Red River natives were being challenged by settlers from Ontario who staked claim to their land (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 116). Begg was doubtlessly thinking of this problem when he said, via the voice of his narrator, that men like Cool and "Dot" are responsible for attempting to "drive the natives of the country back, as they would uncivilized Indians" (329). In keeping with the traditions

of the romance genre these men are punished--greed destroys their veneer of respectability, and they become social outcasts who finally leave the community. Begg acknowledges, however, that a group of half-breeds remain unhappy about events surrounding the upcoming transfer of the North West to Canada. His final words on the subject, written as George Wade's summary of these events, suggest (as do Agnes Laut's comparable words on the cause of the tragedy at Seven Oaks) that the whole affair is the result of misunderstanding:

> "In the first place, the actions of the so-called Canadian party have served to misinform the authorities in Canada as to the real state of the people in Red River. It is evident they do not understand them when they think of taking the Government of the country on the plan proposed by the McDougall party. Then it is equally evident that the lawless doings of a few men have impressed the half-breeds with an erroneous idea of the Canadian party. There is a great misunderstanding in all this, and it is a pity that it should be so." (366)

George Wade says that people like Cool and "Dot" have incorrectly informed the Canadian government that the people of Red River are unhappy under the old regime. As a result, the Dominion government behaves unwisely in proposing to "rescue" the settlers by taking control of the country--without consulting them. He also says that the lawless behavior of a few men has given the half-breeds an incorrect view of the people who favour Canadian annexation. Wade thus lays the blame for Métis dissatisfaction (and for the events leading to the resistance of 1870) on a handful of greedy villains.

Friesen's later historical account, benefitting from the wisdom of hindsight, attributes the 1870 resistance to a more general Anglo-Canadian dominance of the Settlement's political and cultural life. Friesen shares Begg's view that the (largely Métis) population of

Red River was not particularly discontented prior to plans for annexation. He notes that the people were "managing very well in the 1850s and 1860s despite growing concerns about their food supply and control over property" (Canadian Prairies 112). Increasing interest in annexation and the lack of strong government that followed the 1859 failure to renew the Hudson's Bay Company's exclusive right to trade in the North West, however, shook the tranquility of the settlement: "Where government was unstable and land rights were uncertain, political troubles were likely to follow" (115). Although the "Canadian party", composed of a handful of dissatisfied settlers in the English-speaking part of the community, tended to focus its criticism on the Hudson's Bay Company, Friesen assigns the central reason for the Métis resistance to "the French fear of English-Canadian rule in Red River" and, more specifically, to the elevation of "land-hungry Protestant fanatics" (117) within the Canadian party to positions of authority. Friesen's history of events certainly bears a significant resemblance to Begg's fictional account; the major difference is in Begg's conclusion to his story. By ultimately disempowering his villains he gives his novel a happy ending, thereby casting a sanguine glow over the prospects for peaceful and prosperous agricultural settlement[7].

In its dual role of immigration propaganda and homesteader's manual, "Dot It Down"

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[7]Begg had no way of knowing that the Canadian party would be replaced, as an influence in Red River affairs, by the more pervasive forces of Anglo-Ontario civilization. The Ontario emigrants who settled the prairies in the 1870s, W. L. Norton notes, introduced the institutions and values which would dominate the next generation: "A solid body of agricultural practice, a sharp commercial sense, a rigidly utilitarian approach to life, excessive caution, and a dour self-depreciation--these were new things on the prairies and they were to be the spirit in which the prairies were civilised" (168). Villains like Cool and Whirl and "Dot It Down" were replaced as a threat to the independence and cultural sovereignty of French-speaking Métis settlers by law-abiding farmers and merchants from Ontario who soon replaced native residents as the dominant political force in the West.

encouraged European settlement by showing the enormous social and economic potential of the West. Thirty-seven years later W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother provided yet another guide to its successful exploitation. Published in 1908 when European settlement was already well under way, Jarvis's novel provides advice specifically to those wayward young Englishmen who were shipped to the colonies by wealthy parents anxious to avoid embarrassment at home. This advice, expressed by the protagonist as he acquires knowledge and wisdom on his heroic quest, provides prospective settlers with the key to prosperity.

The plot of Letters centres on the adventures of Reginald Brown, an improvident young Englishman sent by his father to make his fortune as a farmer in the West. Written, as the title implies, as a series of letters to his mother, the novel describes the protagonist's initial mistakes and resulting misfortune, his increasing wisdom and his ultimate success. Reginald's acquisition of a modest fortune and a good farm mark the climax of the novel and signal the achievement of his quest.

Reginald's early letters are a commentary on the dangers of false pride, sloth, strong drink and the company of remittance men. The unredeemed hero, newly arrived in Winnipeg, looks down on "uncouth" Canadians and seeks instead the congenial companionship of Jenkins, a remittance man like himself. On the recommendation of Jenkins he purchases, unseen, a farm in Manitoba which he plans to work with the help of his friend and another Englishman. This initial farming experience is a disaster. Too proud to swap work and machinery with his neighbours, as other men do, and too proud to ask for advice, he spends his money unwisely and fritters his time away in drinking and futile efforts to raise grain. Then, already faced with the consequences of crop failure and an end to the

generous money supply from home, he discovers that Jenkins had persuaded him to pay an inflated price for his land in order to share the seller's profit. Reginald sells his farm at a loss, puts his money into oil land on speculation and goes to work for a neighbouring farmer. Although he leaves the farm in disgrace after he accidently shoots (and slightly injures) his employer while out hunting prairie chicken, the young remittance man learns two important lessons here. His boss tells him that the English fall prey to remittance men because they will not trust Canadians, who know far more about farming than they do, and a local parson tells him that his class of Englishman is not respected by Canadians because they do not know how to work: "This is a land of production, and to make this land produce one has to work, and consequently a man's worth is estimated by the amount of work he can do" (48). Reginald has not yet acquired sufficient grace to put these concepts into practice, but he can see that prairie farmers earn a better living than they would by comparable work in the old country. By the time he embarks on the second stage of his quest he is starting to see the blessings of Canadian wisdom.

Not until he is unemployed and without money in Winnipeg, however, does Reginald fully appreciate the importance of work. He has left his employer's farm realizing that the land offers great hope to British emigrants: "Of course, some of the untilled land is poor or worthless," he writes to his mother, "but the great portion simply lacks draining and clearing. To picture this great country peopled, tilled, and cultivated to its full, is to view the Empire's greatest asset" (56). Even without much capital, he says, a man who is willing to work can make an independent living in this "vast extent of latent corn-fields" (57). A gracious Providence having provided man with a "new" land which requires only a little modification in order to meet his needs, it is incumbent upon him to settle the country and to reap its rich

harvests. Remittance men who do not leave indolence and false pride behind them, however, must starve amidst plenty. Cold and hungry in a city of wealth and opportunity, Reginald discovers the merit inherent in work.

Everything in the young Englishman's Winnipeg experience conspires to convince him that the West holds promise only for those willing to earn its rewards. First he learns that employers will not hire remittance men because they do not know how to work and are not willing to acquire new skills. "They can't make a living in a country where they are used to the ways," a helpful Canadian tells him, "and yet they expect to make things go here, where they don't know the ways--and they don't seem to want to know the ways" (74). Then he discovers that his oil lands, through whose sale he had hoped to make an easy fortune, are worthless. Finally, when he applies for a job in a warehouse even though the advertisement had read "No Englishmen need apply," he is told by the office manager that Canadians will not hire "gentlemen" who have not been taught to work. Even the Salvation Army, which has organized a scheme to bring "desirable immigrants" (102) from England, is choosing as prospective settlers not men whose recommendation is impeccable ancestry, but individuals who are accustomed "to lead useful lives at home" (103). Conscious for the first time of his deficiencies, Reginald accepts the need to work. His letters to his mother indicate an increase in wisdom, and he is rewarded by gaining a job in the warehouse with the man who told him, "No Englishmen need apply."[8]

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[8]C. L. Johnstone's The Young Emigrants (1898) similarly advises its juvenile readers that the only way for a young man to make a fortune in the West is ". . . by very hard work and economy in farming or any other occupation that lies before him . . ." (116). Its English protagonists emigrate to the prairies in quest of economic advancement which they acquire only after they have learned the value of thrift and diligence.

Reginald's warehouse job, however, is only the first of several rewards that stem--symbolically--from his new determination to work. After proving his worth in a humble position he is elevated to the status of successful speculator. Reginald's worthless oil land becomes a valuable townsite when a railroad is built through his property, and he sells it to a real estate firm for $10,000--twice the sum that he had when he arrived in Canada. Although this good fortune is the result of luck rather than of skill, prudence or hard work, the moral of the episode is clear--devotion to duty is rewarded with financial success. Reginald is now able to buy another Manitoba farm, to equip it with horses and machinery and to hire workmen. His last letter to his mother, written after harvest, reports a "good" profit and the achievement of his quest--"and so I feel myself a successful Canadian farmer" (117). He concludes by advising young men who emigrate to the West to bank their money and to spend at least a year working for a farmer; this experience will enable them to judge if they like the life and will give them the physical strength and experience to operate their own farms. If they work hard, spend their money wisely, avoid the temptation of strong drink and adopt Canadian ways, the narrative voice implies, they too will prosper.

Jarvis's criticism of remittance men does not make him anti-English. He is critical only of men who are shiftless, lazy and improvident--qualities that characterize the n'er-do-wells who seek an easy fortune in the "new" land but that do not describe the average English citizen. As one of the settlers explains to Reginald, Canadians are among "the most loyal of British subjects" (66). The values that they hold, and that Jarvis promotes, are not intrinsically Canadian but are part of the legacy that British emigrants took with them to North America. The Canadian farmers whose thrift, sobriety and hard work Jarvis lauds are, for the most part, men of English and Scottish stock (even if they arrived in the West via

Ontario or the United States) rather than indigenous Canadians of aboriginal ancestry.

The central paradox of both these novels centres on the author's treatment of the relationship between work and wealth. Their overt message is that anyone willing to work can gain financial success and independence in this resource-rich country--as, indeed, the protagonists do. George Wade, however, inherits wealth from his first wife and from his father. Reginald Brown, by a stroke of pure luck, acquires a small fortune from land speculation[9]. This unearned prosperity mocks the modest wealth that the protagonists gain through honest toil. It also helped to create unrealistic expectations in would-be immigrants, who could extrapolate from novels like "Dot It Down" and Letters the unwarranted assumption that wealth would inevitably bless their labour in the "new" land. The disillusionment which followed failure (experienced by immigrants like Charles Fourchette in Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows, which I discuss in Chapter Eleven) is also part of the western Canadian settlement story. Begg and Jarvis, however, intent upon promoting emigration to the West, tantalize the reader with the prospects of an economic utopia which inevitably rewards hardworking settlers with the prosperity of success.

One of the great ironies of Canadian history is the failure of many prairie farmers to

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[9]Manitoba journalist Kate Simpson Hayes (who worked in Britain as a publicist for Western Canada and the CPR), in a story remarkably similar in tone and content to Letters, similarly rewards her reformed young Englishman with abundant unearned wealth. The protagonist, a supercilious aristocrat from London, decides to become a prairie farmer. Like Reginald he has neither skill nor good judgement, and is both too proud to take advice and too indolent to work. A Canadian friend sums up the situation: "You've spent a deal too much and done nothing. . . . if you want to succeed out West you've got to roll up your sleeves and go at farming like a man!" ("The La-de-dah from London," Prairie Pot-Pourri 34). His attempt to farm is about to end in disaster when he marries a sensible Canadian farm woman who inspires him to become a **real** farmer. The "Lah-de-dah" learns to work, prospers accordingly--then inherits an aunt's enormous fortune.

realize the prosperity flaunted in immigration propaganda and the homesteading romance. As Barry Wilson notes in his study of the Canadian grain industry, the history of Prairie farming is "littered with victims who were unable to convert the promises of the land, the politicians, and the speculators into an adequate living" (3). By 1930 more than 40% of the homesteaders had lost their land as a result of crop failures, low grain prices, high transportation and production costs and inadequate land holdings (Wilson 3). The economic aftermath of the war illustrates one of the important causes of this social disaster--the farmer's weak position in economic bargaining. Depressed wheat prices which followed the wartime boom were not accompanied by equally low prices for farm inputs; Fowke notes that from 1920 to 1923 the price of farm products fell by one-half to almost three-fifths, whereas the prices of manufactured goods fell by only one-third and the Canadian cost of living index by less than one-fifth (78). Farmers thus bore the brunt of generally unfavourable economic conditions[10]. The much-vaunted agricultural progress described in publications like Davin's Homes for Millions and in the homesteading romance disguise the injustice of an economic system designed to serve the interests of business at the expense of agriculture.

Fowke's history of the Canadian wheat economy and Wilson's study of more recent conditions in the grain industry both conclude that government immigration policies were designed to benefit manufacturing, transportation and other business interests rather than the interests of either prairie farmers or rural prairie society in general. Their conclusion is

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[10]Widespread dissatisfaction with the existing grain companies and the grain marketing system led to the establishment of the prairie Wheat Pool system in 1923 and 1924, and ultimately to the establishment of a permanent Canadian Wheat Board in 1943.

echoed by Stan Rowe, who notes that political leaders and captains of industry are the beneficiaries of "an exploitive industrial export-based agricultural system that has poorly served a large sector of the farming population while running down the soils, diminishing surface and subsurface water, and destroying native ecosystems and habitat" ("Transforming Agiculture" 6). Government and industry agricultural specialists continue to promote over-production even in times of dwindling markets, he says, because high-production agriculture means high consumption and high cash flow. "It is capital-intensive and needs all kinds of city goods and services to make it work, thereby keeping the economy humming" ("Transforming Agriculture" 7). The transformation of prairie agriculture from food production to commodity production represents not so much an intentional change in direction by farmers as it does a deliberate government policy designed to encourage prosperity in the powerful manufacturing and farm service sectors[11].

In spite of the frequency of homesteading failures, early prairie novelists usually portrayed the pioneer settler's economic success. The protagonists in Alexander Begg's "Dot

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[11]Most homesteading romances glossed over the harsh economic conditions faced by prairie farmers. One exception is Chas. W. Peterson's The Fruits of the Earth: A Story of the Canadian Prairies (1928). Although the novel ends with the success of its English immigrant farmers, it acknowledges the prevalence of farm poverty and of the injustice of an economic system that privileges the urban population. The protagonist's father, affectionately called "the Sage," acts as a spokesperson for the author when he attributes the fundamental grievances of agriculture to "the demands of urban labour the world over for a standard of life, in terms of higher wages and shorter hours, away beyond anything the farmer can hope to enjoy, and for which agriculture now has to pay in higher operating costs out of dwindling returns received for the products of the soil" (263). The narrative point of view favours political action to right this injustice, but rejects "radical" solutions such as a socialist alliance of farmers and labour. It makes vague pronoucements about the need to control transportation costs and big business interests, but blames most of the farmer's problems on "the gluttonous demands of urban labour" (293) rather than on the business and government leaders who profit most from low commodity prices and high production costs.

It Down" and W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother are typical heroes of the homesteading romance in their victorious quests for prosperity. In theory this prosperity is the reward for diligent toil and self-denial. In practice, however, the heroes' sudden acquisition of unearned wealth is at odds with the novels' overt purpose of instructing prospective homesteaders in the art of farming for profit. Although the happy endings complement the thematic treatment of wealth as a definition of success, they also violate an ideological stance that views wealth as the concomitant of hard work and frugality. They ignore, too, the harsh reality of external conditions which proved inimical to the farmer's financial well-being. "Dot It Down" and The Letters of a Remittance Man, in their suggestion that thrift and diligent labour ensure success, fail to consider the economic climate created by a national policy which privileged business interests above the interests of prairie farmers. Anthropocentric in tone, they are not only flawed guides to the development of sustainable agriculture, but also unrealistic proponents of a materialist utopia. In their emphasis upon farming as a profitable commercial activity, they help lay the groundwork both for expectations of wealth that ended in failure and for the industrialized factory farms of the twentieth century.

Chapter Ten

Mastering the Natural World: Anthropocentrism in the Prairie Novels of Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphrey Ward

> Most people believe there is a right way to **do** agriculture and that failure to **do** it correctly is simply a failure in character. The very **nature of farming** itself is seldom called into question, and the one who does question agriculture itself may be accused of wanting to return to a bow and arrow way of life.
>
> - Wes Jackson, New Roots for Agriculture, 1980[1]

Begg and Jarvis were not the only writers who depicted a prosperous agricultural economy in the West. The dream of wealth which lured immigrants to the prairies from eastern Canada, the United States and Europe pervades the entire body of early homesteading fiction. It is particularly important in the prairie novels of English writers Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, whose farmer protagonists are guided by a vision of bountiful crops and high wheat prices. Prosperity, however, is only one of the objects of these homesteading quests; the strong, virile men who carve farms from the wilderness and transform "wasteland" into wheatfields are also guided by a dream of dominion over the natural world. Wealth, and its corollary of marriage to well-born English maidens, is the visible reward for their conquest of the land. The power which enables these men to plough

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[1]pp. 1-2.

and sow the virgin prairie and to cut and stack the slough-grass hay gives them mastery of both female hearts and Nature. Bindloss and Ward celebrate the heroism of the stalwart men whose agricultural victories provide wealth for the Canadian North West and bread for the people of England. An ecocritical reading of their novels, however, can trace the cultural roots of environmental problems which plague prairie agriculture today to the anthropocentric values embedded in the homesteading romance.

The quest structure of the novels that I discuss in this chapter glorifies the homesteader's subjugation of the natural world. The heroes of Bindloss's prairie fiction and of Ward's Canadian Born, by dint of hard work and self-sacrifice, win both wealth and domestic bliss by conquering wild Nature. Since Bindloss was a prolific writer I can explore only a few of his novels, many of which are set in western Canada. I refer to five in the course of this chapter: Winston of the Prairie (1907), By Right of Purchase (1908), Lorimer of the Northwest (1909), Masters of the Wheat-lands (1910) and Prescott of Saskatchewan (1913). There is a remarkable similarity in tone and content not only between each of these novels but also between Bindloss's homesteading romances and Ward's Canadian Born (1910). The prairie fiction of both these novelists (who knew the prairies as visitors from England rather than as residents) pays tribute to the men whose long hours at the plough helped open the West to British settlement and made it a productive and profitable daughter of the Empire.

All these novels follow a common plot pattern in which the virile hero wins his beloved through agricultural deeds of valour. In Winston of the Prairie the farmer protagonist saves Colonel Barrington's aristocratic English settlement of Silverdale from incipient financial disaster by breaking new land and seeding vast acreages to wheat; his

success brings wealth to the community (and ultimately to himself), and wins him the leadership of Silverdale and the hand of its founder's niece in marriage. The Canadian hero of By Right of Purchase "purchases" the daughter of an impoverished upperclass Englishman in order to prevent her from marrying a scoundrel; he wins her love and admiration by sowing all his land to wheat in spite of falling grain prices, then harvests a profitable bumper crop that will make him rich. Ralph Lorimer in Lorimer of the Northwest proves his worth by heroically undertaking the backbreaking and dangerous task of railroad construction in order to pay farming expenses when his crop is destroyed by early frost; he, too, is rewarded with the love of a well-born Englishwoman and with the wealth necessary to make Fairmead one of the biggest farms "anywhere on the wide grass-lands between Winnipeg and Regina" (384). The Canadian protagonist of Masters of the Wheat-lands has nerve enough to drill "his last dollar into the soil in spring" and stamina enough to "give the sweat of his tensest effort, the uttermost toil of his body" (84) to the important work of breaking new land and growing wheat for the nation and the world; like Bindloss's other heroes he conquers a hostile wilderness in order to win a beautiful, cultured wife and a profitable harvest of grain. The hero of Prescott of Saskatchewan embraces a life "of stern toil and frugality in the grim Northwest" (39) and is rewarded for his endeavour by prosperity and domestic bliss. The ambitious railroad-builder-turned-politician-and-farmer in Ward's Canadian Born earns the admiration and love of the wealthy English heroine by his faith in Canada and by his delight in "the daily planning and wrestling, the contrivance and the cleverness, the rifling and outwitting of Nature--that makes a Canadian--at any rate, a Western Canadian" (130). This simple equation of mastering Nature with financial success, and of financial success with marriage, suggests the major theme of these prairie novels: Western man, working long days

behind the plough, wins both wealth and happiness by dominating the natural world.

Since both authors contrast the courage and determination of the prairie farmer with the self-indulgence and aimlessness of the English gentleman, their novels also appear to equate mastery of Nature with a strength of purpose unique to Canadians. A representative scene from Winston of the Prairie, for example, clearly emphasizes the Western homesteader's superiority to the old world dilettante. Maud Barrington and her aunt, standing near a bluff outside their home, can see at one glance both the hired men of Silverdale "toil[ing] in the sun-baked furrow" (174) and the gaily-clad young women and men of the settlement playing tennis on the "little square of velvet green." The narrator notes approvingly that the men are building a future for themselves and Canada; their labour is part of a heroic effort "that was to turn the wilderness into a granary" (175). The colonists, on the other hand, are stagnating in a life of pleasure: "Winning slowly, holding grimly, [the men] were moving on, while secure in its patrician tranquility Silverdale stood still . . ." (174). Even Colonel Barrington, himself bound by the traditions of the past, recognizes that the settlement's financial difficulties stem from the colonists' inaptitude for work; the refined, leisure-loving gentleman, he grudgingly admits, may be "somewhat of an anachronism" (88) on the prairie. The unbroken West needs strong, purposeful men who can endure hardship and who can toil without rest from daybreak to dusk. The settlers of Silverdale, like their aristocratic English counterparts in Bindloss's other novels, play at being homesteaders while the real work of making a great nation falls to the Canadian farmer.

The plots of all six novels, however, clearly associate man's domination of Nature with deeply-rooted **British** values. Several passages from Masters of the Wheat-lands will serve to make apparent this connection between anthropocentrism and the Anglo-Saxon

heritage that impelled Britons to conquer and settle the nations of their Empire. Harry Wyllard, the protagonist, tells the English heroine that he's "as English" (50) as she is even though he was born in western Canada. Her island nation made Englishmen from Saxons, Norsemen and Normans, who took with them English culture when they emigrated to British colonies around the world: ". . . those who had gone out South or Westwards had carried that influence with them, and, under all their surface changes, and sometimes their grievances against the Motherland, were, in the great essentials, wholly English still" (51). Since these men of British stock became, socially and politically, the most powerful members of prairie society, western Canada soon adopted the institutions and values of the "Motherland." Its English-speaking settlers could thus continue to be English while living in the West. These men and their descendants are the homesteaders whom Bindloss describes. His Canadian farmers are neither Ukrainian peasants nor Métis habitants, but members of this privileged social group. They bear no resemblance to the Slavic people and other "frowsy aliens" (Masters 78) who crowd the hold of the emigrant ship that returns Harry Wyllard to Canada. Instead, like their German and Scandinavian brethren, they are ambitious pioneers bent on economic success. This latter category of immigrants, indeed, constitutes the only "desirable" group of foreign settlers. The unnamed gray-haired Canadian whom Wyllard and party meet aboard ship acts as spokesperson for the author when he categorizes his new countrymen by their potential value to the nation's future prosperity:

> "One's the kind that will get up and hustle, break land, and build new homes--log at first, frame and stone afterwards. They go on from a quarter-section and a team of oxen to the biggest farm they can handle, and every fresh furrow they cut enriches all of us. The other kind want to sit down in the dirt

> and take life easily, as they've always done. The dirt worries everybody else, and we've no use for them." (95)

The English, German and Scandinavian settlers work hard and will subsequently enjoy a propserity that benefits both themselves and their adopted country. The Jews and the Slavic people, on the other hand, are satisfied with subsistence agriculture that adds no wealth to the Canadian economy. Aside from the dubious accuracy of this portrait of Jewish and Slavic immigrants, what emerges is a pejorative comment on people who raise food for themselves rather than crops for sale. (I discuss this issue in the next chapter when I look at novels of assimilation.) Bindloss's description privileges a commercial agricultural economy above a self-sufficient peasant economy. The English and their western European brethren are superior immigrants because they work hard at the laudable task of converting a wilderness, useless but for its production of furs, into an agricultural empire that produces wealth for the entire nation.

Since Bindloss's and Ward's major characters are either English or of English origin, neither writer contrasts the decadence of old world people with the superior virtue of indigenous Canadians. Instead, they both contrast the ambitious farmer who stakes his future on the new country with the decaying aristocracy of the Motherland. The protagonists who are born in Canada are not appreciably different from Winston[2], "one of the Englishmen who, with a dim recognition of the primeval charge to subdue the earth and render it fruitful, gravitate to the newer lands, and usually leave their mark upon them" (Winston of the Prairie 230-1). Crucial to an understanding of these novels is the recognition that the heroic

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[2]Winston and Lorimer are the only protagonists born in England.

Canadian farmers are not a new breed of men but are English in their determination to exercise dominion over Nature[3].

Bindloss's descriptions of his protagonists indicates that the "masculine" qualities of courage, strength and endurance play an essential role in being English. In an important passage from By Right of Purchase, for example, he associates his hero's successful quest to subdue the earth with these virtues of patriarchal culture:

> Round three-fourths of the horizon the bleached prairie, tinged now with sunny ochre, melted into the sweep of lustrous blue, but in the foreground the sod was gemmed with little crocus-like flowers and already flecked here and there with creeping green. All this was waste and virgin, but on the fourth side tall bands of golden stubble, and belts of ashes where golden stubble had once been, were narrowed down by the steaming chocolate-tinted clods of the plough's upturning. Grain ran up in long rippled ridges from Prospect, where the birches gleamed silver, across the wide dip of basin and over its fringing rise, into the luminous blueness of the sky. That was man's work, and man at Prospect worked unusually hard, for it was not his part there to plough where others had also sown, but to grapple with the wilderness, and subdue it, in fulfilment of the charge given him when the waters dried. The wilderness was there, leagues of it, but it required a stout heart and a steadfast toil to break it and cover it with red-gold wheat when wheat was a drug upon a falling

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[3] This attitude is not unique to the English, but is part of a post-Medieval, Western worldview compounded of Judaeo-Christianity, mercantile capitalism and the spirit of scientific rationalism.

market. (122)

Although the unbroken prairie is "gemmed" with purple flowers and flecked with "creeping green," the narrator dismisses it as "waste and virgin" land. Of far greater value to him is the tilled land covered with the ashes and stubble of last year's crop, evidence of man's fulfilment of the charge to exercise dominion over the earth. In order to make the entire wilderness fruitful, he says, man must labour hard and long behind the seed drill and the plough, confident that the land will repay his "steadfast" toil.

Charley Leland is typical of the masterful men whose lean, hard bodies bear the stamp of "man's dominion over the material world" (By Right of Purchase 128). When his father dies during his third month at McGill, Charley quits university and returns to the family farm. During the next eight to ten years he doubles his holdings until he farms thousands of acres "on a lordly scale" (14). Forceful, optimistic, wasteful of neither effort nor money, a man "accustomed to exert authority, but not exactly what in the most restricted English sense of the word would be called a gentleman" (8), he is a prototype of the bold, strong men who build nations. Although wheat prices are low he seeds his biggest crop ever. He faces outlaw vengeance to help the NWMP stop livestock rustling. He fights like a madman to save his fields from a raging prairie fire. He staves off ruin by "unceasing toil and Spartan self-denial" (162) when the market goes against him. Like other pioneers who give of their strength and courage to win new lands for humankind, Charley Leland uses the power of his disciplined body and the determination of an unyielding will to harness and subdue wild Nature. In the "new Northwest" where it is "manhood that counts" (341), he is a model of those masculine virtues which enabled the British to win the scattered lands of a mighty Empire.

In contrast to Charley are the ineffective English gentlemen who contribute nothing to the growth and prosperity of their country. Jimmy Denham is a charming, weak-willed hedonist who admits that he has "no particular capacity for hard work and self-denial" (16) and Reggie Urmston is "a nice boy" (By Right of Purchase 53) who lacks resolution and strength. Colonel Barrington (in Winston of the Prairie) and Colonel Carrington in (Lorimer of the Northwest) are brave, gallant men who lack frugality and practical management skills. Jernyngham (in Prescott of Saskatchewan) is eccentric and irresponsible, Gregory Hawtrey (in Masters of the Wheat-lands) is weak-willed, Philip Gaddesden (in Ward's Canadian Born) is a sickly, undisciplined dreamer and Arthur Delaine is an effete scholar who would never leave "any great mark behind him" (Canadian Born 44). These men are, for the most part, honourable individuals (only the outlaw Courthorne in Winston of the Prairie is a villain, and even he is at least partly redeemed by gallantry and courage). Their besetting sin--and it is a serious one in the eyes of the authors--is their failure to subdue the earth and bend it to their needs. The English gentlemen play tennis, study Greek, read novels, travel, seek adventures in the wild and cultivate delightful idiosyncracies while farmers like Winston and Prescott and Leland toil faithfully behind the plough. As Colonel Barrington comes to recognize, however, "Times change . . ." (296). The courtly gentleman of old world charm is an anachronism in the new West and must be replaced by powerful men whose tough moral fibre enables them to master wild Nature.

The English heroines in Bindloss's and Ward's novels complement the protagonists' masculine strength with feminine charm and graciousness. Although they express their willingness and determination to work as helpmates to their husbands, they are not primarily housekeepers and mothers but dainty, elegant creatures from the upper class who bring

beauty to the Spartan lives of the men they marry. As Winston tells his beloved, woman connects working man with the sweet, graceful part of life: "Those who strive in the pit are apt to grow blind to the best--the sweetness and order, and all the little graces that mean so much. . . . they lose touch with all that lies beyond the struggle, and without someone to lead them they cannot get back to it" (Winston of the Prairie 217). Bindloss's and Ward's wellborn English ladies carry the refinement and charm of an English manor to the unpainted bachelor shacks of the prairie. They bring books, art and music to men whose lives are a grim, endless struggle with Nature. Like Maud Barrington they lift these men above "the sordid cares of the turmoil" to their own "high level" (Winston of the Prairie 188). The embodiment of grace and beauty, their merit lies in their possession of those "feminine" qualities which in the English gentleman are signs of weakness. Culture and the arts in these homesteading romances are the exclusive domain of gentle ladies.

The prairie wife, however, is more than an ornament; in a strenuous world where everyone works, as one of Bindloss' heroines observes, she joins man as an active partner in his toil:

> Woman was man's real helpmate, not a companion for his idle hours. She kept his house, and in time of pressure drove his horses; she had her say in determining the count of the cattle and the bushels of seed, and it was sometimes conceded that her judgment was the better. (Prescott of Saskatchewan 270)

Although Carrie Leland is the only heroine whom we see primarily as a wife rather than a sweetheart--the other women marry near the end of the novel-- there is general acceptance that woman must share man's labour. Lady Elizabeth Merton, used to the elegance of life on an English estate, is not alone in her refusal to be intimidated by the realization that a woman

who marries a prairie farmer "must put her own hands to the drudgery of life, to the cooking, sewing, baking, that keep man--animal man--alive" (Canadian Born 221). Carrie Leland, indeed, not only learns to cook and bake and sew; she also drives a maddened team through thick smoke in order to carry water when fire threatens their crops, helps Charley and the North West Mounted Police capture dangerous rustlers and boldly makes important financial decisions when her husband collapses from overwork. In spite of their genteel backgrounds, then, these women play (or intend to play) an active role in the work of a prairie farm[4].

Bindloss's treatment of Sally Creighton (in Masters of the Wheat-lands) provides an interesting perspective on the role of the women who marry Anglo-Canadian farmers. It suggests that the ability to shed sweetness and light is of greater value than the practical skills associated with housewifery and farming. Sally is the only woman in these novels who is born and bred on a prairie farm--and the narrator judges her harshly. Although she is a shrewd, courageous person with the financial and administrative ability of a good manager, the novel's initial description of her emphasizes only her **bucolic** charm: "Sally was less than half-taught, and unacquainted with anything beyond the simple, strenuous life of the prairie. Her greatest accomplishments consisted of some skill in bakery and the handling of half-broken teams; but she had once or twice given [the incompetent Englishman she loves] what he recognized as excellent advice" (14). The narrator's tone is almost contemptuous as he

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[4]Although Bindloss's and Ward's heroines share their husbands' struggles, they are cushioned by wealth and status from the sometimes harsh reality of homestead life. Elizabeth Merton, for example, falls in love with Canada as a pampered guest of the CPR. Later, as the wife of a prairie farmer, her money protects her from "the real hardships of the country" (Canadian Born 338), and provides her with both comfort and luxury. The other women, not independently wealthy, can use their husbands' prosperity to purchase privileges unavailable to most pioneer women.

suggests that this ignorant country girl is capable of little more than making bread, handling half-wild horses and accomplishing other "simple" rustic chores. Even his acknowledgement of her "excellent advice" to Gregory Hawtrey has a patronizing air; Sally's homespun wisdom has proved apt on one or two occasions, but presumably has not had a major impact on him. The narrator is not critical of Sally, but his praise of her is clouded by ambivalence. His observation that she is "primitive and passionate, but . . . determined" (220) in her relationship with Gregory, for example, implies that her exemplary determination is qualified by less admirable virtues. His tribute to her superb skill with horses is counterbalanced by a question regarding her feminine charm: although behind a team she is "in her place and in harmony with her surroundings," he wonders if her appearance "would have been less effective in a drawing-room" (236). A neighbour woman sums up the general assessment of her character: "Sally is simple--primitive, you would call her--but she's clever and capable in all practical things" (252). Leaving aside the question of just how primitive Sally in fact is--she demonstrates a keen understanding of finance when she rescues Gregory from the mortgage-broker and straightens his tangled affairs--we are left with the conclusion that the determination and practical cleverness which win wealth and happiness for the male protagonists are less potent when embodied by a woman. It is true that Sally does win the man she loves, but he turns out to be a questionable prize. Gregory Hawtrey is a well-educated Englishman of good family, but he is also a shallow, shiftless man without depth of character: "He had a few surface graces, and on occasion a certain half-insolent forcefulness of manner which in a curious fashion was almost becoming. There was, however, nothing beneath the surface" (349). The English lady who marries the protagonist remembers that she had once foolishly thought that Gregory was marrying beneath him; now she recognizes

that although Sally is far from perfect, "in the essentials the man was not fit to brush her shoes" (352). Is marriage to such a man a reward for a woman's courage and determination? The refined English heroine marries a man who is powerful and honourable and rich; the strong, pragmatic prairie farm girl marries a n'er-do-well. The power and mastery which bring a man prestige and wealth and the love of a good woman bring Sally Creighton the dubious prize of a charming remittance man.

Since male dominance is associated with anthropocentrism and mastery of Nature, can we not exult in woman's more desirable association with beauty and culture? In an egalitarian world which honoured such "feminine" qualities, the answer might be "yes." But the wheatlands of the prairie, like the untamed North of Douglas Durkin's The Lobstick Trail, is a "man's country" (By Right of Purchase 23). The direction of society is set by men who use their strength and determination to exert power over Nature. Women who revere natural beauty for its own sake (like Durkin's Jule Allen) or value books and music above wealth are ultimately disempowered. Although Bindloss and Ward suggest that the graceful feminine virtues which balance male pragmatism make woman man's equal in the West, the anthropocentric ideology underlying their fiction privileges human (or masculine) dominion over the natural world.

This anthropocentrism pervades the heroes' quests. Its elevation of prosperity and power above culture and refinement is evident in the protagonists' vision of a prairie landscape transformed by man's hand. In Winston of the Prairie, for example, Winston dreams of a future in which the inhabitants of the West exchange cultural traditions for the social and economic rewards of mastering Nature:

> "I fancied I saw Silverdale gorging the elevators with the choicest wheat," he

> said. "A new bridge flung level across the ravine where the wagons go down half-loaded to the creek; a dam turning the hollow into a lake, and big turbines driving our own flouring mill. Then there were herds of cattle fattening on the strippings of the grain that wasteful people burn, our products clamored for, east in the old country and west in British Columbia--and for a back-ground, prosperity and power, even if it was paid for with half the traditions of Silverdale." (188)

Winston is willing to sacrifice "half the traditions" of the English settlement in order to provide food for the people of Great Britain and wealth for the Canadian nation. He recognizes, however, that the fulfillment of this dream involves not only food production, global export markets and international finance but also human power over the natural world. Agriculture on the prairies is part of an anthropocentric value system which grants man dominion over the beasts of the field, the trees of the wood and the soil of the fertile plains.

Bindloss's treatment of agriculture, then, suggests that raising food is inextricably connected to the generation of wealth and the exploitation of Nature. His farmers are neither peasants nor self-sufficient Edwardian husbandmen, but heroic pioneers who unlock the riches stored for eons in prairie sod. The description of spring ploughing at Prospect, Charley Leland's farm in By Right of Purchase, is typical in its emphasis on man's masterful role in mining this wealth:

> [The men] seemed almost a part of it, as they and the patient beasts did their share in the great, harmonious scheme which in return for the sweat of effort gives man bread to eat. This was not English farming, mixed and variable, but an unlocking of Nature's long-stored wealth in mile-long furrows that

> should fling the golden wheat by trainload and shipload on the markets of the world. (123)

This vision of prairie agriculture, circa 1908, anticipates the factory farming made possible by the replacement of horses with gasoline-powered tractors. Intrinsic to it is the concept that man earns his rightful place in the "great, harmonious scheme" of things by "unlocking" the treasures of Nature. Humankind's God-given dominion over the natural world legitimizes, indeed blesses, tillage of the prairies to meet the needs of an international commodity market.

Bindloss is aware of the contradictory impulses behind the farmer protagonists' noble mission to feed a hungry world. Wheat's dual role as both a source of food and an international commodity creates an ambivalent situation; insufficient demand for bread often creates huge surpluses of wheat. On the one hand, as Charley Leland says regarding his plans to break an additional two hundred acres, "There are folks who want the wheat, and we'll feed the world some day" (By Right of Purchase 128). On the other hand, wheat prices are going down because the world appears to possess "a sufficiency of wheat and flour" (246). Charley's financial success, then, is dependent not only upon his own harvest but also upon crop yields in other parts of the world. In order for him to succeed, other men must fail. Not until hail destroys crops in the Dakotas and Minnesota--a disaster which ruins hundreds of farmers--is the delicate balance between supply and demand tilted in favour of higher wheat prices.

Charley's explanation of the way in which the market works emphasizes the dark side of grain production, the side which has little to do with the idealistic goal of feeding the world's hungry. Commodity prices do not reflect stable demand for food, but the fluctuating

vagaries of an international market:

> "The world wants so much wheat, though the quantity varies, because there are places where they eat other things when it gets too dear. Now, you can get statistics showing how many million bushels they have raised here and there, and it's evident that, if it's less than usual, it's going to be dearer. On the other hand, if there's more than the world has apparently any use of, the men it belongs to have some trouble in selling it, and values come down. That's the principle, but there are men who make their living by shoving prices up and down, and they're able to do it sometimes against all reason." (305)

Grain prices, influenced by crop conditions already subject to the whims of Nature, are further dictated by investment activity in the financial capitals of the world. Speculators on the open market, treating wheat as a commodity comparable to coal and steel, manipulate supply and demand--and therefore prices--by the purchase and sale of wheat futures. Sometimes they drive wheat prices up, other times they plunge prices down so low that they barely cover cost of production. The farmer who wants to make a profit thus finds himself a participant in a global game of Stock Market[5]. No longer a simple producer of food, he becomes a helpless victim of the grain exchange or a speculator dependent upon the workings of a complex economic system.

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[5]Western farmers bitterly attacked the futures trading which was a major activity of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. Although some members bought and sold cash grain for domestic and export markets, others bought and sold grain futures for the purpose of making a profit on price fluctuations (Fowke 185). Farmers insisted that this speculative activity influenced the price of grain, and lobbied the government to replace the competitive open market system with a price-controlled marketing board. Not until the establishment of a permanent Canadian Wheat Board in 1943, however, was wheat removed from the open market.

It is significant that the masterful Canadian farmer participates, albeit reluctantly, in the questionable practice of speculation whereas the English gentleman passively accepts economic failure. Colonel Barrington, leader of the English settlement of Silverdale, refuses to speculate on the market in order to compensate for falling grain prices: "We are wheat growers and not wheat stock jugglers. Our purpose is to farm, and not swindle and lie in the wheat pits for decimal differences" (Winston of the Prairie 66). Winston, on the other hand, makes a substantial profit by buying and selling grain futures. He acknowledges the undesirability of speculation, but plays the market because that is the only way he can obtain the dollars to save Silverdale. Although he recognizes that what Barrington aims for "stands high above" (229) mere prosperity, his financial success vindicates his action. "You and I and a few others will be rich this year," (274) he tells Barrington's niece Maud, whose affairs he has managed. Wealth, and not spiritual grace or cultured refinement, is the object of the hero's successful quest.

An episode in Lorimer of the Northwest, of minor significance in the plot of the novel but of major importance thematically, illustrates the conflict between the values of the aristocratic English gentleman and the pragmatic Canadian farmer. The settlement of Carrington wants to build a creamery which would enable it to process and sell its surplus dairy products. The best location for the creamery, however, is on land owned by Colonel Carrington and he refuses to allow commercial development on his property. In a speech to the assembled colonists he says that his sole object has been to make the settlement a suitable home for the English gentleman, a place where he "can live economically if he will work a little, enjoying abundant sport and the society of his equals" (353-4). This old world ideal is threatened by the prospect of an enterprise which would destroy the tranquility and beauty of

unspoiled Nature:

> "Green Mountain is the finest cover for game on the prairie, and while I live no man shall cut timber, make roads, or put up a factory there. Neither will I in any way countenance the opening up of Carrington--my Carrington--to industrial exploitation for the influx of all and sundry. I will have no railroad nor any kind of factory within our limits if I can prevent it, and seeing in it the thin end of the wedge I must ask you to abandon the creamery scheme." ((354)

Ecologists could protest that Colonel Carrington wants to maintain Green Mountain as a game cover which would preserve wildlife for **human** use. Cultural materialists could point to the class bias inherent in his arrogant rejection of a development which would open his holdings to "all and sundry." Colonel Carrington's position would, however, safeguard an undeveloped area (appropriately named Green Mountain) from industrial exploitation. ". . . Would you make this clean, green land like Lancashire or parts of Pennsylvania?" he asks his fellow colonists. Since these men share the Colonel's dislike of commerce and his love of sport and open spaces, none of them wish to see Carrington "defiled" (354) by the smoke of mills and factories. The narrator observes, indeed, that a little diplomacy on the Colonel's part could have persuaded them to abandon their scheme for development. The colonists do not want large-scale industrialization that would turn their green fields into soot-covered subdivisions, but only good wagon roads, a creamery "and a few other similar things" (355). The success of their modest endeavour, however, symbolizes a pro-development victory legitimized by the "happy ending" of the story. The Colonel is defeated in his effort to stop the creamery project, and control of the community passes to men less set against progress.

The aristocratic, old world settlement thus becomes part of a prairie society bent on economic success.

The symbolic issue in the Carrington debate moves beyond a discussion of whether or not a creamery should be built to the more general question of what constitutes desirable progress. The Colonel wants to maintain the community in a state of pastoral innocence; proponents of the creamery advocate some degree of technological and industrial development. Given the ideological framework of the homesteading romance, it is inevitable that the latter win. The government policies which promoted Western immigration were based upon an unquestioned belief in economic progress. The homesteading novel, in its romantic portraits of men and women whose honest toil brought prosperity to the wilderness, unequivocally endorsed this ideal.

Although we cannot trace environmental degradation directly to the ideology of the homesteading romance, we can attribute unsustainable farming practices to economic goals set during the early years of Western agricultural expansion. The American historian Donald Worster, for example, blames a number of ecological problems on "our extreme dedication to the goal of maximizing agricultural productivity and wealth," a cause espoused in Bindloss's and Ward's fiction. Although Worster acknowledges that farmers are certainly not unique in their belief that prosperity is the most important social good, he is emphatic in his condemnation of wealth as a desirable objective for agriculture: "Almost everything we have celebrated as our success in farming has been defined in terms of those ends. It has now, however, become clear that our ends have been our undoing" (32). Soil erosion, loss of genetic diversity, depletion of water resources, chemical contamination and dependence on polluting, non-renewable energy sources are only some of the costs of modern, high-

production agriculture. Ecologists Judith Soule and Jon Piper similarly note, in their recent study Farming in Nature's Image, that the goal of sustainability "contrasts starkly" (82) with the agri-business goals of high yield and short-term profits. Although natural resources appeared unlimited during the homesteading era, current evidence that the planet has reached or exceeded the global limits to growth indicates that ever-increasing agricultural output "no longer makes any sense" (Soule and Piper 221). Even Canada's Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture, an august body from whom one would not expect radical pronouncements, attributes the serious problem of soil depletion to "our preoccupation with increased productivity" (5). In a 1984 report, Soil at Risk: Canada's Eroding Future, the committee notes that federal and provincial departments of agriculture often ignore long-term consequences to the soil when they encourage farmers to expand production for both domestic and export markets. Grain producers have been able to increase crop yields since the 1940s by using fertilizers, pesticides, new crop varieties, more effective soil management practices and improved agricultural implements (Rennie and Ellis 46). The opportunity to break and sow new land similarly allowed their pioneer counterparts--men like Bindloss's Charley Leland--to increase crop production. The concept of infinite expansion--absurd in a finite world of ecological limits--is not unique to late twentieth-century agriculture, but has fueled the popular imagination since the early days of farming in the West. Ward's tale of a land blessed with "fruitful infinity" (Canadian Born 333) and Bindloss's heroic accounts of mastering the prairie wilderness helped sustain a pioneer myth that inspired generations of European immigrants and native-born Canadians to convert vast expanses of virgin grassland to domestic, food-producing fields of grain.

The desire for prosperity that motivated agricultural expansion was the external force

that drove homesteaders to sacrifice ecological sustainability for increased productivity; also important, however, was the compulsion to master Nature and harness it to serve human need. This desire to exercise dominion over the natural world pervades Bindloss's and Ward's fiction. Miss Barrington's blessing of Winston's decision to seed all his land to wheat, for example, reflects an approval of his "good work" that is characteristic of the homesteading romance--there is "more than dollars, or the bread that somebody is needing" (Winston of the Prairie 143) behind the farmer's toil. By making the wilderness blossom he fulfills the biblical injunction to subdue the earth and be masters of God's creation (Genesis 1:28). The homesteader takes pride in "wresting another quarter-section from the prairie", using the strength of his hands to take "[his] own" (Masters of the Wheat-lands 68) from capricious Nature. The thrill of victory when he wins, as Harry Wyllard says, repays him for his struggle:

> "The gold's there--that you're sure of--piled up by nature during I don't know how many thousand years, but you have to stake high, if you want to get much out of it. One needs costly labor, teams--no end of them--breakers, and big gang-plows. The farmer who has nerve enough drills his last dollar into the soil in spring, but if he means to succeed it costs him more than that. He must give the sweat of his tensest effort, the uttermost toil of his body--all, in fact, that has been given him. Then he must shut his eyes tight to the hazards against him, or look at them without wavering--the drought, the hail, the harvest frost, I mean. If his teams fall sick, or the season goes against him, he must work double tides. Still, it now and then happens that things go right, and the red wheat rolls ripe right back across the prairie. I don't know that

> any man could want a keener thrill than the one he feels when he drives in the binders!" (84)

Because Nature is an inconstant mistress, fickle in the bestowal of her gifts and demanding in her expectations, the prairie farmer must "stake high" in order to reap a rich bounty. He must bravely pit the strength of muscle, capital, technology and human will against her forces of drought and hail and frost. Sometimes he loses (although neither author portrays defeat); when he wins, however, he tastes the thrill of mastery and victory over a worthy foe.

Although Bindloss concedes that many pioneers give their best to a land that "but indifferently shelters them" (Winston of the Prairie 13) in exchange for their toil, the narrative line of the homesteading romance rewards human endeavour and thus perpetuates the anthropocentric myth of dominion over Nature. Ward's protagonist, indeed, triumphs in man's supremacy. As the train that carries them on their westward journey rolls through southern Alberta, he exults in the knowledge that irrigation has extended wheat production to the semi-arid grassland. This technology has given humans unprecedented power over the environment: "We are mastering it!" he tells Lady Merton. "'And you thought'--he looked at her with amusement and a kind of triumph--'that the country had mastered us?'" (94). He shows her the Government farms where scientists are breeding early-ripening wheat varieties and trees that will withstand the prairie winds. Their efforts, the narrator says, will "draw onward the warm tide of human life over vast regions now desolate" and in the centuries to come will turn "this bare and boundless earth, this sea-floor of a primaeval ocean . . . into a garden of the Lord" (95). Anderson himself is furthering this noble work by his participation in a large development scheme which, by bringing steamers and railways to the Peace River area, will encourage a fresh influx of settlers to develop its fertility. Man thus imposes his

"ordered civilization" (290) on the wilderness and dominates a "terrible and hostile earth" which, the narrator says, "had starved and tortured and slain him in his thousands, before he could tame her to his will" (333). Mastery of Nature assumes the status of moral virtue in an inhospitable world where man must battle hostile forces in order to earn a livelihood.

Bindloss's emphasis upon the domestic and pastoral in his descriptions of the countryside reflects his high valuation of this human victory over Nature. Buildings, cultivated fields and livestock dominate the canvases of his prairie landscapes. Prescott's farm is typical of homesteads which thrill the beholder with a beauty garden-like in its richness and ordered simplicity:

> Streaked by [the] speeding shadows [of the clouds], the great plain stretched away, checkered by ranks of marigolds and tall crimson flowers of the lily kind that swayed as the rippling grasses changed color in the wind. A mile or two distant stood the trim wooden homestead, with a tall windmill frame near by, girt by broad sweeps of dark-green wheat and oats. These were interspersed with stretches of uncovered soil, glowing a deep chocolate-brown. . . . Beyond the last strip of rich color, there spread, shining delicately blue, a great field of flax; and then the dusky green of alfalfa and alsike for the Hereford cattle, standing knee-deep in a flashing lake. (Prescott of Saskatchewan 29)

Bindloss uses nouns and adjectives that create a picture of a man-made paradise. The windmill and trim wooden buildings of Prescott's homestead provide the focus of the scene. They are surrounded by evidence of man's successful labour--"broad sweeps of dark-green wheat and oats," strips of summerfallow "glowing a deep chocolate-brown," a "great" field of

flax "shining delicately blue" and crops of alfalfa and clover for the cattle standing in a "flashing" lake. Even the the wild prairie is dotted with marigolds and flowers "of the lily kind" that evoke images of a cottage garden. There are no scenes of pristine wilderness in Bindloss's prairie fiction, no romantic visions of wild Nature in its primeval splendour. Instead, his works abound with pastoral imagery and pictures of Nature tamed by human hand.

This emphasis on human dominion explains the novelists' acceptance of the ugly prairie towns which novelists such as Sinclair Ross would later portray with such scorn. Although Ward's protagonist dreams of trees and a landscaped park for the growing town which he hopes to represent, the towns in Bindloss's novels are crude and ugly places without even the compensating promise of future beauty. The settlement nearest the protagonist's farm in By Right of Purchase is typical in its bleak desolation: "It rose abruptly from the prairie, without sign of tree or garden to relieve its ugliness, an unsightly jumble of wooden houses in the midst of a vast white plain . . ." (61). Even spring cannot relieve the dreariness of rutted streets and unpainted buildings adorned with faded commendations of "the wares sold within" (139). These towns are commercial centres whose virtues lie in their contributions to the prosperity of the country. Their crude strength, as Lady Merton observes in Ward's Canadian Born, is what constitutes their charm: "Some of it is ugly, I know--I don't care! It is like a Rembrandt ugliness--that only helps and ministers to a stronger beauty, the beauty of prairie and sky, and the beauty of the human battle, the battle of blood and brain, with the earth and her forces" (130). Visible symbols of economic growth, prairie towns illustrate man's mastery of Nature. Their beauty lies in their value as tangible evidence of human dominion over the natural world.

Bindloss and Ward celebrate Anglo-Canadian man's conquest of the prairie landscape. Their heroes' strength of body and purpose enable them to tame the forces of hostile or indifferent Nature and to win both wealth and domestic happiness. Underlying their victories, however, is a drive for supremacy that extends beyond the mere desire for prosperity. The farmer protagonists of these novels seek power over Nature. In their single-minded pursuit of human mastery they upset the delicate equilibrium of prairie ecosystems. Their failure to develop a sustainable system of agriculture lies in the arrogance and anthropocentric values which fuel their dreams of dominance.

Chapter Eleven

Foreigners: Integrating the Ethnic "Other" in Four Novels of Assimilation

> . . . assimilation can only be mutual. Only if you take from [foreign immigrants] will they take from you. . . . these 'foreigners,' little as most of us realize it, have something to give as well as to receive; and what they have to give is vastly more than the motive power of arm and back; they bring a spiritual heritage as well as their brawn which is at best an economic asset.
> - Frederick Philip Grove, "Canadians Old and New," 1928[1]

One of the tasks faced by members of the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture in the early years of the twentieth century was the assimilation of foreign[2] immigrants. In order to integrate central European peasants and Scandinavian fishermen into an essentially British society, Church and State joined forces in an intense campaign of social indoctrination. They were ably assisted in their endeavour by authors of the homesteading romance. Ralph Connor's The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan (1909) and Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows: A Story of the Alberta Foothills (1926) portray the integration of Galician and Belgian peasants into the modern, mercantile economy of western Canada. E. Antony Wharton Gill's Love in Manitoba (1911) and Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart

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[1]p. 174.

[2]Throughout this chapter I use the words "foreign" and "Galician" in the way that they were popularly used during the homesteading period (although without the often-pejorative overtones). "Foreigners" were non-English-speaking immigrants and "Galicians" (called after the Hapsburg province of Galicia) were Slavic people from Central Europe.

(1923) describe the cultural assimilation of Scandinavian immigrants. Although these writers differ in the degree to which they privilege Anglo-Canadian culture above the traditions of non-English speaking people, they share a common belief in the value of economic progress. In their rejection of old world peasant cultures for modernity and financial success, they helped to justify the ecologically exploitative development of the West.

The unprecedented burst of immigration that flooded western Canada between 1897 and 1929 resulted not only in an enormous increase in the number of people, but also in a dramatic change in the ethnic composition of prairie society. The population which, in the late nineteenth century, had been predominantly Canadian by birth and British by national origin, became increasingly cosmopolitan during the first quarter of the twentieth century. J. S. Woodsworth, then superintendent of a Methodist mission which worked with new Canadians in Winnipeg, noted with alarm that one-third of the total immigration to Canada during the second half of 1907 was non-English-speaking (22). By 1931 one-third of all prairie residents had been born in another country and the proportion of the population which was British in origin had declined to about 50% of the total (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 244).

This shift in the ethnic blend of society caused widespread concern within the Anglo-Canadian community. In Strangers Within Our Gates, his study of the social problems resulting from the rapid increase in foreign immigration, Woodsworth points out that many new Canadians--Japanese, Hebrews, Russians, Italians, Galicians and Hindus--come from alien religious and cultural traditions "very near the bottom" (22) of the social scale. Established settlers feared that these "undesirable" newcomers would underbid the labour market, overtax charitable institutions and public health facilities, change the political

balance of power, increase crime and illiteracy and swell the population of urban slums (Woodsworth 184-220). Of particular concern on the prairies was the growing number of impoverished, illiterate central European peasants; Ukrainian immigrants alone numbered at least 200,000 by 1931 (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 265). Fearing that the educational, religious and political institutions of the West could not easily assimilate so many foreigners, Anglo-Canadians became preoccupied with finding solutions to a problem which threatened to destroy the cultural supremacy of their society.

This society, of course, was not indigenous to the prairies, but was the legacy of the women and men who served as colonizers for the British Empire. The English and Scottish pioneers who settled the West instilled their social and economic values in the schools and churches and other institutions that they founded. Their "Norman and English heritage of order and freedom," as Robert England says in The Central European Immigrant in Canada (1929), was instrumental in creating the prosperous civilization which soon replaced aboriginal native culture. Although England recognizes that "effort-creating" (168) pioneer conditions and a multi-racial immigrant community contributed to this remarkable achievement, he attributes Canadian success primarily to the disciplined ambition of its early British settlers. Foreign immigrants are welcome to make their home in Canada, he says, but they must adopt Anglo-Norman habits that "tend towards progress" (169). Woodsworth, similarly, insists that Canada needs more British settlers in order to maintain its cultural traditions and to "mould the incoming armies of foreigners into loyal British subjects" (46). Conscious of the superiority of their British heritage[3], both men believed that Canada must

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[3]This outspoken pride in Canada's British heritage is also evident in Captain R. W. Campbell's A Policeman from Eton: His Prairie Diary (1923). The narrator praises the good

assimilate foreign immigrants. This attitude, of course, served the interests of the dominant culture; by maintaining their own institutions and practices the British ensured their continued social and economic supremacy (Craig 26). They also ensured the continued dominion of humans over Nature. Since the dominant culture was anthropocentric and based upon material exploitation of natural resources (as I point out in Chapter 10), assimilation helped to accelerate the development of the West and the on-going destruction of prairie ecosystems.

Foreign immigrants were considered more or less desirable as settlers on the basis of the ease with which they could be assimilated. Swedes, Germans, Norwegians and other emigrants from northern and western Europe were generally favoured because their hard work and commercial endeavour contributed to national prosperity. Latin emigrants and Galicians, on the other hand, were considered less desirable because they failed to respond **en masse** to the mercantile spirit of the new Dominion (although even their critics agreed that they served a useful function as hewers of wood and drawers of water). Woodsworth approvingly quotes an American commentator, J. R. Commons, who divides European immigrants into two geographical groups on the basis of their value as settlers. One group represents a progressive civilization comparable to that of Great Britain; the other, "scarcely a single generation removed from serfdom," represents the primitive civilization of a backward peasantry:

> A line drawn across the Continent of Europe from northeast to southwest,

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judgement of a Rev. J. Macgregor of Moose Jaw who "would people the land" with Scot settlers: "While he knows the value of industrious foreigners from Europe, he sees that if Canada is to fulfil her part in the Anglo-Saxon world, it can only be done by the supremacy of British blood" (255).

> separating the Scandinavian Peninsula, the British Isles, Germany and France from Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Turkey, separates countries not only of distinct races but also of distinct civilizations. It separates Protestant Europe from Catholic Europe; it separates countries of representative institutions and popular government from absolute monarchies. It separates lands where education is universal from lands where illiteracy predominates; it separates manufacturing countries, progressive agriculture and skilled labor from primitive hand industries, backward agriculture and unskilled labor; it separates an educated, thrifty peasantry from a peasantry scarcely a single generation removed from serfdom; it separates Teutonic races from Latin, Slav, Semitic and Mongolian races. (qtd. 164)[4]

Although English-Canadian opinion was divided on the question of whether or not alien immigrants could be assimilated, it shared a common belief in the superiority of Teutonic culture. Liberal-minded men like Woodsworth and England did not believe that Polish and Hungarian and other Galician immigrants were innately inferior to women and men of British stock, but they did agree that their culture was inferior and that these immigrants must therefore be redeemed by education. This, as Craig points out, is "cultural but not racial discrimination" (33). In order to become acceptable members of prairie society, central European immigrants had to replace their own traditions with the traditions and values of

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[4]Note the similarity of this sentiment to the view that Bindloss's unnamed grey-haired Canadian expresses in Masters of the Wheat-lands (see Chapter 10).

Anglo-Canadian culture[5].

Ukrainians, Hungarians, Russians and other Galicians were generally considered less desirable as immigrants than northern and western European people because their "unprogressive" peasant backgrounds made them difficult to integrate into the dominant culture. Although most English Canadians were confident that they would be assimilated (Barber xvi), people from central Europe posed a greater challenge to the integrative powers of social, educational and economic institutions. At the heart of the problem, as Robert England notes, was the unenterprising nature of peasant culture:

> The Ruthenian [Ukrainian] in his native land is personally unpractical, unenterprising, and unambitious with regard to wealth, ease, and worldly advantage. He does not want better food, better clothes or to do less than the minimum of work. He has his garden, his maize, his cow, his horses. He likes a little gambling or a little more "schnapps" or vodka. His mind would fain believe that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He does not care to add thought to thought, slow endeavour to slow endeavour in the hope of

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[5] A third category of immigrant, seldom mentioned in the homesteading romance, consists of "undesireable" African, Asian and Middle Eastern settlers. Even Frederick Philip Grove, himself a foreigner and a vocal critic of Anglo-Canadians for their treatment of non-English-speaking immigrants, would exclude coloured people such as Hindus and "Afrikanders" on the grounds that they are "too different to admit of even the dream of assimilation" ("Assimilation" 187). Like Woodsworth, Grove sees Canadian and Eastern cultures as essentially incompatible; since non-assimilable elements are "detrimental to our highest national development," they must be "vigorously excluded" (Woodsworth 232) from Canadian society. Chinese immigrants, the only "non-assimilable" people who settled in significant numbers on the prairies, figure as minor characters in novels such as Nellie McClung's Painted Fires (1925) and Robert Stead's Dennison Grant (1920), but they remained socially marginal in both fiction and life throughout the entire homesteading period.

making a little more money. (58)

This lack of ambition stands out sharply against a Canadian background of industry and progress. Immigrants who are "centuries behind" (England 60) in their use of agricultural technology and in their social and political practices are viewed as a questionable asset in a country bent on "getting ahead." Confident in the power of education to reshape peasant culture, however, England insists that the people of Canada must provide immigrants from central Europe with the means "of raising the standard of their economic and social life" (99) so as to make assimilation both desirable and possible. Thus inculcated with appropriate "progressive" values, the Ukrainian peasant and the Russian Doukhobor make exemplary homesteaders[6].

Novels such as The Foreigner and New Furrows describe the process by which foreign immigrants discard the shackles of their peasant backgrounds and become good Canadians. In their positive illustration of British homesteaders and the ambitious

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[6]Few writers were as intolerant or as pessimistic about the possibilities of assimilation as novelist Francis Whitehouse. Two of the villains in Plain Folks: A Story of the Canadian Prairies (1926) are a "bohunk" (47) named Paul Olynk and his friend Ugly Mike. The narrator's comment on their fellow "Galicians" suggests not only an intolerance of cultural diversity, but also a fixed belief in the inferiority of Slavic people:

> At the time whereof we write, trainloads of "Ugly" Mikes and Paul Olynks were arriving in Canada weekly. The steamship companies needed them to fill their steerage accommodation. A paternal government needed them to make good under its immigration policy. But Canada, as a land of white men, needed them not at all. In those days, passengers waiting for trains at junctions, such as Sudbury, would see colonist cars, crowded with rough-looking foreigners, stop for water on their way westward, and proceed again on their way. "What awful faces!" women would remark; and men, having the welfare of Canada at heart, would turn away in disgust. Well might they! For this was the dregs of the world. The scum of Europe--down-trodden, resentful and vicious. (48)

Novels such as this encouraged the denigration of "foreign" cultures and perpetuated the prevailing attitude of Anglo superiority.

immigrants who adopted their values of "industry, thrift, sobriety and loyalty" (Rea 51), and their negative illustration of dirty, ignorant foreigners who clung to their old world traditions, these novels promoted an Anglo-Saxon view of Canadian citizenship and thus served the cause of the dominant culture.

Although the author's preface to The Foreigner suggests that a new people is being created in Canada by blending disparate racial groups into a new race "greater than the greatest of them all," Ralph Connor's novel advocates the assimilation of Galician foreigners into an essentially Anglo-Canadian culture. Out of a melodramatic narrative involving Nihilist plots and murderous acts of vengeance emerges a young Russian man's quest to become an accepted member of prairie society. Kalman Kalmar is sent by a benevolent English lady from the slums of Winnipeg's foreign colony to her brother-in-law's ranch in Saskatchewan. There he learns the secrets of Anglo-Saxon success: hard work, self-discipline and economic ambition. Kalman learns to farm, finds and develops a coal mine and marries the daughter of a wealthy Scottish capitalist. Although he does not renounce his own people, but works for their social and economic advancement, his success depends upon rejecting their peasant values and replacing them with the ideals of the dominant British culture. Becoming a Canadian means assimilation into a mercantile society grounded on principles antithetical to peasant life.

Connor's stated literary intent is to celebrate the creation of a nation composed of many races blended into one. His preface implies that Saxon and Slav will contribute equally to a new culture that will reflect the ideals and traditions of its multi-racial immigrant roots:

> In Western Canada there is to be seen to-day that most fascinating of all

> human phenomena, the making of a nation. Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all.
>
> It would be our wisdom to grip these peoples to us with living hooks of justice and charity till all lines of national cleavage disappear, and in the Entity of our Canadian national life, and in the Unity of our world-wide Empire, we fuse into a people whose strength will endure the slow shock of time for the honour of our name, for the good of mankind, and for the glory of Almighty God. (n.p.)

His novel, however, suggests that the generosity with which Anglo-Canadians extend justice and charity to their foreign brethren is motivated not by an egalitarian recognition of cultural equality but by the desire to win converts to their own ideology. This is not the creation of a new culture, but the integration of one people into the culture of another.

Clothing provides a useful metaphor for the process of asssimilation. Although the replacement of traditional old world dress with fashionable Western attire might appear of minor importance, Connor's treatment of Irma Kalmar's metamorphosis from an awkward peasant girl to a beautiful Canadian woman symbolizes the power of such visible manifestations of culture. Prior to her transformation Irma is "slatternly, ragged and none too clean" (161), like any other Galician girl. She is influenced to change, however, by her assimilated friend Margaret Ketzel. Irma contrasts the "sordid, disorderly wretchedness of her own life and home" with the ordered tranquility of Margaret's world: "Her facility with the English speech, her ability to read books, her fine manners, her clean and orderly home,

her pretty Canadian dress, her beloved school, her cheerful mission, all these were to Irma new, wonderful and fascinating" (160-1). With the help of Mrs. Ketzel she discards her peasant garb for clothing like Margaret's, and learns that the "pretty Canadian dress" is a key to the "wonderful and fascinating" life of Anglo-Canadians.

Irma's fashionable new frocks give her unprecedented power and authority. As an "ill-dressed Galician child" in Paulina's rooming house she is too "timid" and too "stupid" to protest her exploitation by the greedy Bukowinian entrepreneur who uses her as an unpaid servant and by the boarders who use her as a plaything. Canadian dress, however, transforms her into "a being of grace and loveliness and conscious power" (163-4). Like the English language, it is part of the culture of a conquering people and thus confers status. Irma's new costume acts as a powerful talisman which prevents the degrading attentions of the Galician men:

> For such subtle influence does dress exercise over the mind that something of the spirit of the garb seems to pass into the spirit of the wearer. Self-respect is often born in the tailor shop or in the costumer's parlour. . . . child though she was, she became conscious of a new power over . . . all the boarders, and instinctively she assumed a new attitude toward them. The old coarse and familiar horseplay which she had permitted without thought at their hands, was now distasteful to her. Indeed, with most of the men it ceased to be any longer possible. (166)

Irma's pretty frocks empower her; they increase her self-esteem and self-confidence, and they give her power over the Galician men. No mere concession to personal vanity, they are the means of converting her from a humble peasant girl to a confident young woman and, finally,

to the charming matron of a modern hospital. As a metaphor, then, adoption of Canadian dress illustrates the value of assimilation into the dominant culture; by discarding peasant garb and peasant ways for the "superior" habit and practices of Anglo civilization, the Central European immigrant can lift herself from poverty and oppression to the heights of prosperity and social success.

This contrast between peasant culture and the culture of Anglo-Canadian society is evident throughout The Foreigner. Connor's description of a wedding celebration, for example, highlights the superiority of virtuous Edwardian domestic life to the disorder and squalor of Galician festivity:

> . . . while respectable Winnipeg lay snugly asleep under snow-covered roofs and smoking chimneys, while belated revellers and travellers were making their way through white, silent streets and under avenues of snow-laden trees to homes where reigned love and peace and virtue, in the north end and in the foreign colony the festivities in connection with Anka's wedding were drawing to a close in sordid drunken dance and song and in sanguinary fighting.
>
> In the main room dance and song reeled on in uproarious hilarity. In the basement below, foul and fetid, men stood packed close, drinking while they could. It was for the foreigner an hour of rare opportunity. The beer kegs stood open and there were plenty of tin mugs about. In the dim light of a smoky lantern, the swaying crowd, here singing in maudlin chorus, there fighting savagely to pay off old scores or to avenge new insults, presented a nauseating spectacle. (87-8)

This passage privileges the respectable English-speaking population of Winnipeg above the quarellsome, drunken inhabitants of the foreign colony. Along with Connor's other descriptions of Galician life and culture, it suggests that Anglo-Canadians and their kin have a monopoly on wholesome family life and domestic virtue. Galicians live in dirty tar-paper shacks. They crowd fifteen men, women and children into a single "evil-smelling, filthy room" (137). They prefer ineffective peasant remedies to proper medical treatment for their children. Their women are slovenly drudges and their men ignorant beasts. Is it any wonder that Connor elevates the Anglo-Saxon ideals of thrift, sobriety and hard work above the values of this degraded culture?

In contrast to these Galician peasants are the admirable British. Jack French, the Englishman on whose ranch Kalman lives, is the first man other than his father whom the boy can fully admire. French gives him a "new image of manhood" to replace the brutal images that people his childhood memories. The rancher shows "courage and patience and perfect self-command" in his handling of horses and men, and exhibits a "quickness of sympathy" which reveals the "finer temper and noble spirit" of an English gentleman. Although French is also a n'er-do-well alcoholic who neglects his farm and flies into murderous rages when drunk, he is English and therefore has "a subtle something" (219) that elevates him above lesser mortals. His superior character enables him to stop drinking and to become a progressive farmer whose fenced fields, imported stock and new house with stables and granaries are symbols of growing prosperity. Like his philanthropic sister-in-law Mrs. French and the brave, manly Presbyterian missionary Dr. Brown, Jack French illustrates the sterling qualities that made the British Empire a powerful force in the world. He thus provides an excellent model for ambitious foreigners.

Connor blames the inferiority of Galician culture on a mid-European heritage of political and religious oppression. An authoritarian Church and successive Czarist regimes have endowed the masses with a fatalistic passivity and robbed them of moral will. Mrs. Fitzpatrick's horror when she learns that her neighbour Paulina lets male boarders sleep on the floor of her bedroom reflects not her ethical superiority but the difference between cultural traditions separated by "generations of moral development" (24). Paulina, passive and simple-minded, is not personally depraved but comes from a Hungarian culture in need of redemption. Like the other inhabitants of Winnipeg's foreign colony, her conscience has been stifled by generations of repression. "A beastly tyrannical government at home has put the fear of death on them for this world," one of Connor's spokespeople says, "and an ignorant and superstitious Church has kept them in fear of purgatory and hell fire for the next" (97). Although Connor believed that religion must shape the moral standards of a people, he viewed the Greek Catholic Church as greatly inferior to Protestant churches. The Polish priest in The Foreigner is a dirty, licentious drunkard and thief who tries to keep his people in ignorance by forbidding the children to attend the Presbyterian missionary's school. That he is not an isolated example of corruption is evident in Brown's failure to find a decent Slavic priest willing to serve the Galician community: "We had offers, plenty of them, but we could not lay our hands on a single, clean, honest-minded man with the fear of God in his heart, and the desire to help these people" (275). Connor was doubtlessly influenced by the anti-Catholic feeling prevalent among Protestants in the early years of the twentieth century (although his French missionary priest, old Pere Garneau, is a courageous and kind-hearted man). Like other Protestant clergy he viewed himself as a representative of secular Anglo-Saxon civilization as well as a spiritual leader of his people. He therefore viewed with

disfavour an unprogressive, authoritarian church which discouraged the integration of its members into the dominant (Protestant) society. Protestant missionaries saw their purpose as twofold; they wanted both to Protestantize and to Canadianize the immigrant population (Barber xvii). Like Dr. Brown, who wants to make the Galicians "good Christians and good Canadians, which is the same thing" (253), they saw themselves as responsible for indoctrinating socially and morally backward peasants with the ideals of English society.[7] Novels like The Foreigner reiterate the superiority of Protestant, Anglo-Saxon values and emphasize the need to propagate them in the minds and hearts of culturally-disadvantaged new Canadians. By contrasting the moral decadence of peasant culture with the moral health of Anglo-Canadian society, writers like Connor helped to ensure that the values of the latter would dominate the West.

What English-speaking Canadians primarily objected to in the Galician settlers was their failure to contribute to the development of the local and national economy. Their old-fashioned, unprogressive ways alarmed homesteaders and business people bent on economic progress. A. R. Ford's comments on the Doukhobors in Woodsworth's Strangers Within Our Gates are typical in their condemnation of a culture that is hopelessly out of step with Canadian society: "They are actually some seven hundred years behind the times. Their customs, their mode of thought, their whole spirit is that of the thirteenth century rather than

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[7]An article in the Methodist Missionary Outlook of June 1908 complacently notes that the moral standards and ideals of the "nominal Christians" who owe allegiance to the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches are "far below those of the Christian citizens of the Dominion." The article goes on to exhort its readers to meet these new Canadians "with the open Bible" and "to instil into their minds the principles and ideals of Anglo-Saxon civilization" (qtd. in Barber xviii-xix). This view, Barber notes, was not unique to Methodists, but expressed general Protestant values (xix).

the twentieth" (96). Although Ford acknowledges that the simple, communistic life of the villages is "almost idealistic" (99), and that the people are clean, hard-working and thrifty, he is shocked by the absence of schools and the lack of progressive ambition. "What apparently is needed more than anything else is education," he says, "and an opportunity to get away from the narrow round of their mediaeval life" (101). Even the Slavic homesteaders who settled on their own farms were considered unprogressive; a teacher in a foreign district reports to Robert England what many other observers note as well--that although there are many "successful farmers and good citizens (97)," amongst the Galician people, the settler from south-eastern Europe is generally a poorer, more conservative and improvident farmer than his English-speaking counterpart. Men and women whose farms met little more than their own need for food, fuel and shelter were regarded with disdain by a nation which categorized its immigrant population according to standards based on the concept of progress. These standards, as Indian human rights activist Corinne Kumar D'Souza critically notes, privilege modernity and industrialization above the values and practices of more primitive societies:

> . . . a hunting culture is more primitive and therefore less civilized than an agrarian one, and that in turn more primitive than one committed to the industrial mode. The industrialized society is the peak of progress--the "other" civilizations must catch up. The dominant mode must become the universal. (32)

Central European farmers, viewed with disfavour because they are less industrialized and progressive than their American and Anglo-Canadian counterparts, make good Canadians

only if they are assimilated into this dominant mode[8].

It is tempting to conclude that writers like England, Ford, Woodsworth and Connor deliberately created a misleading picture of central European immigrant life in order to bolster the virtues of their own culture. This comfortable view, however, stands up poorly under scrutiny. Although their clarity of vision was doubtlessly dimmed by an ideological bias in favour of progress, these men base their critiques on personal knowledge of immigrant communities. Many of their observations are confirmed by historians such as

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[8]Gilbert Parker's categorization of immigrant people by their value to the Canadian economy vividly illustrates the prevailing ideology of progress. In The World for Sale (1919) he contrasts the "unprogressive" foreign inhabitants of Manitou with the progressive business people of neighbouring Lebanon:

> Originally Manitou had been the home of Icelanders, Mennonites, and Doukhobors; settlers from lands where the conditions of earlier centuries prevailed, who, simple as they were in habits and in life, were ignorant, primitive, coarse, and none too cleanly. They had formed an unprogressive polyglot settlement, and the place assumed a still more primeval character when the Indian Reservation was formed near by. When French Canadian settlers arrived, however, the place became less discordant to the life of a new democracy, though they did little to make it modern in the sense that Lebanon . . . was modern from the day the first shack was thrown up.
>
> Manitou showed itself antagonistic to progress; it was old-fashioned, and primitively agricultural. It looked with suspicion on [Lebanon's] factories . . . and on the mining propositions, which circled the place with speculation. . . . It was a settlement twenty years before Lebanon had a house, though the latter exceeded the population of Manitou in five years, and became the home of all adventuring spirits--land agents, company promoters, mining prospectors, railway men, politicians, saloon-keepers, and up-to-date dissenting preachers.

The plot of this improbable novel centres on the conflict between these two prairie towns and between the two men who love Fleda Druse, Syrian daughter of a Romany king. One man, lecherous and deceitful, is a leader of her own people and a master of the violin; the other is a successful Anglo-Canadian entrepreneur, manager of "great" commercial interests and "disturber of the peace of slow minds" (12). Fleda's marriage to the brilliant financier rewards her for her virtue and symbolizes the moral ascendancy of Anglo-Canadian civilization. A staunch advocate of imperial interests, Parker (born and raised in what is now Ontario) served as a member of Parliament in England between 1900 and 1918. He never so much as visited the North West country that provided a romantic setting for some half-dozen of his popular adventure stories.

Friesen, who notes that Ukrainian peasant migrants left behind a society in which poverty and illiteracy were the norm, in which drunkeness was common and in which churches upheld an unjust **status quo**: "The oppressive conformity of the village, the brutal brawls of the drunken spree, the magic and superstition, and the proverbs that declared, for example, that 'an unbeaten wife is like an unsharpened scythe' were not mere figments of Protestant social workers' imaginations. They constituted centuries-old habits of a peasant society and were sources of tension when this society was re-established" (Canadian Prairies 266).[9] Central European immigrant life was not a picturesque, romantic idyll of rustic bliss but an often brutal existence in which the oppressive old country influence of Church and state was transferred, in the "new world," to the oppressive influence of community and family.

Less open to criticism than the social and political quality of peasant life, however, was its impact on the local environment. The small size of central European farms, the poverty of the farmers and the attachment to the land "that gives a peasantry its strength and continuity" (Evans 221)--these factors contributed to the careful stewardship of traditional agriculture.[10] Geographer Gottfried Pfeifer, in a 1956 study of peasant life in the western part of central Europe, notes the relative absence of erosion and soil depletion on land worked by the peasantry and observes that these areas "are not the ones where the

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[9]Vera Lysenko's Yellow Boots (1954), a fictional account of Ukrainian immigrant life in Manitoba written by a second-generation Ukrainian-Canadian, confirms Friesen's observation on the socially repressive nature of peasant culture.

[10]In Love in Manitoba, E. Antony Wharton Gill notes that the Western farmer is characterized by a "capacity for taking care of his own interest in a business way" and by an absence of "the sentiment which binds an Englishman to the village where he was born, and to the home where he played as a child" (290-1). These qualities of economic pragmatism contrast sharply with the mid-European peasant's spiritual bond to the land.

conservationist is most needed" (241). The practice of crop rotations, the husbanding of organic matter and the recovery of soil washed away by rain ensured the long-term health of fields and pastures[11]. (Similar practices had earlier preserved subsistence agrarian ecosystems in medieval western Europe prior to the widespread adoption of capitalism [Merchant 43-4]). Although the irresponsible use of power by an authoritarian Church and State unleashed a chain of oppression which reached to the youngest and most helpless members of mid-European society, the resulting social violence did not extend to abuse of the natural environment. Immigrants from Poland and Russia and the Ukraine took with them to the prairies their view of land as "a sacred thing" (Grove, "Assimilation" 178) more important than either prosperity or individual ownership rights. This spiritual heritage helps to account for the difference between peasant cultures and the modern British culture that dominated Canadian (and early American) society.

Since Canadian agriculture developed under the auspices of capitalism, prairie farm practices reflected from the start a preoccupation with short-term economic gain. Farmers wanted to raise crops that would give them the quickest and biggest possible return on their investment. Grove was one of the few critics who questioned the ecological wisdom of mining the soil in order to provide money for superfluous luxuries. Prairie agriculture, he says, produces wheat, but it also consumes land by converting crops into dollars, and dollars into payments on automobiles and farm machinery: "May we not question the ultimate

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[11]Dr. F. H. King notes a similar concern for the preservation of soil fertility in his 1911 study of peasant agriculture in China, Korea and Japan. Oriental farmers, he says, have been able to farm intensively for more than three thousand years because they use cultural practices to prevent the "enormous" field erosion tolerated in the United States (103) and because they restore to the soil the human, animal and plant "wastes" consigned to garbage and sewage disposal systems in affluent North American nations (15).

wisdom of exporting the fertility of the soil in order to keep the machinery of a so-called up-to-date life lubricated?" he asks ("Assimilation" 179). Implicit in Grove's criticism is the central arguement of ecocriticism--that anthropocentric practices designed for the short-term benefit of humankind inevitably lead to the long-term degradation of entire ecosystems. Even Robert England, an articulate spokesperson for the cause of assimilation, worries about the ecological costs of an industrial system that "tears from soil, mine, air, and water" (163) the resources necessary to meet inflated human needs and that replaces traditional agricultural husbandry with the "industrial weapons" (164) of machinery and mass production. These men recognized that high-production, export-oriented agriculture led to general prosperity in the years prior to the depression[12], but that it did so at the expense of soil fertility and the integrity of prairie ecosystems.

Ralph Connor, however, blithely disregards these costs when he advocates assimilation. His Dr. Brown, concerned about the social impact of an "undigested . . . mass" of over twenty-five thousand central Europeans on the prairies, insists that the Galicians must be incorporated into Canadian society: "They must be digested and absorbed into the body politic. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada" (255). The institutions most responsible for this educative role, those bodies which "gave us our ideas and our ideals" (256), are the school and the Church. These august institutions complement the work of business and industry by making self-sufficient old world peasants dependent on a mercantile economy. School and Church teach new Canadians that their social acceptance depends upon exchanging their "backward" ways

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[12]As I point out in Chapter 10, this prosperity existed alongside acute poverty and the common failure of homesteaders to "prove up" and acquire title to their land.

for practices that make them part of a commercial economic system. The railroad and Kalman's coal mine, in a symbiotic relationship with the Church, provide the jobs and prosperity which allow the Galicians to take part in Dr. Brown's successful program of modernization:

> The old mud-plastered cabins were giving place to neat frame houses, each surrounded by its garden of vegetables and flowers. In dress, the sheep skin and the shawl were being exchanged for the ready-made suit and the hat of latest style. The Hospital with its staff of trained nurses . . ., by its ministrations to the sick, and more by the spirit that breathed through its whole service, wrought in the Galician mind a new temper and a new ideal. In the Training Home fifty Galician girls were being indoctrinated into that most noble of all sciences, the science of home-making, and were gaining practical experience in all the cognate sciences and arts. (372)

As a result of Brown's influence the Galicians replace their log cabins with houses built from purchased lumber, their traditional peasant garb with store-bought clothes and their folk remedies with professional medical services. Their young women, whose mothers learned from their mothers home-making skills passed from one generation to another, are indoctrinated into the domestic "sciences" by the teaching staff of his Training Home. This incorporation of an unsophisticated, pre-scientific people into a modern capitalist economy is part of what Connor means by Canadianization. Dr. Brown's mission is not only to lead his flock to spiritual salvation, but also to make it part of a scientifically progressive, commercial society.

Slavic people were not the only victims of Anglo-Canadian prejudices; western

European peasants, too, experienced discrimination by the dominant culture. Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows, the story of a young Belgian woman's assimilation into Canadian society, suggests that class as well as ethnic background played an important part in determining the social acceptability of prairie immigrants. Williams's foreigners are treated with a "certain amount of deference" by emigration agents because they are Belgians, "and hence considered clean and thrifty, superior beings to those who came literally in hordes from central Europe" (15). The Fourchettes, however, come from peasant stock and soon prove to be as much in need of assimilation as Connor's dirty, ignorant Galicians. Henri Fourchette is a brutal and stupid man ill-adapted to homestead life and his wife is a dull-witted, slovenly drudge. Although they are always working, they are poor, unsuccessful farmers obliged to live with their seven children in a squalid, one-room shack. The wealthy, English Hearst family, on the other hand, enjoys "that beautiful art of living which is peculiarly English" (33). Its members have time for riding, for walking, for tennis, for conversation by the fireplace, for reading and studying and writing letters--and time to look after their farm. No wonder Marie Fourchette, the aspiring young protagonist, rejects her own background and adopts the superior culture of the Hearsts! Although both families are pioneer farmers, the Fourchettes are "of the earth" (87), poor peasants molded from inferior clay, while the English people are gentlefolk with money and generations of "good" breeding behind them. Williams insists, in the words of Mrs. Hearst, that Belgians "almost invariably make good" (248), but her pejorative description of the only Belgians in the novel privileges modernization and Western cultural ambition above the sordidness and hardship of backward peasant cultures.

Williams's ambivalence toward the small-scale, mixed farming that characterizes

peasant agriculture is expressed in her treatment of Mrs. Hearst's opinions on Western agricultural policy. The Englishwoman's analysis of the failure of big farms and wheat monocultures to sustain the fertility of the soil and the social and economic stability of the farm community is exemplary in its perception of the costs of modern agriculture:

> ". . . the days of easy money in the west are over. We can no longer stake everything on wheat. We are wearing the land out, and we always have the fear of a drought. I have had meals at farms where everything on the table, including milk, butter, eggs and bread, came from the store. In the lean years, these are the people who face disaster.
>
> "I believe that the day of the big farms is over, as well as the day of the wheat farms. I would like to see the Government placing the settlers on small farms, a hundred acres or less-- something the Europeans can understand and handle. In that way they could all afford irrigation in the dry sections, they would have a better social life and a surer livelihood." (253-4)

Underneath this enthusiasm for self-sufficiency and the preservation of rural livelihoods, however, is a contempt for peasant culture. Although Mrs. Hearst recognizes that she is not a "real pioneer" (256), that her money gives her privilege and protects her from hardship, she has little sympathy for the peasant woman who must endure poverty and ceaseless toil. Herself comfortably situated on the 2,000-acre Hearst farm, she considers Madame Fourchett an "ignorant, greedy Belgian" (51) for wanting to expand her quarter section (160 acres) homestead. Which family is the greedier? And why is laudable ambition in one person called greed in the next? The answer lies in the Anglocentric class bias implicit in the novel. The narrative point of view admires Mrs. Hearst for her participation in the work of the farm

but fails to express equal admiration for the woman who, after the police take her insane husband to the asylum, is left with "more work than she could manage," but bravely carries on alone:

> The pigs to feed, the chickens to care for, the food to cook, the small children to look after. . . . the long, cold drive in the winter to take the milk to the railway. . . . However, Madame Fourchette had the stolid peasant attitude towards heavy tasks. She accepted them uncomplainingly. (156)

There is pity in the narrative voice, but little esteem for the woman who works from necessity rather than choice. Madame Fourchette is "stolid" and uncomplaining, like an animal in harness, rather than proudly strong and independent. There is no recognition of virtue in her ability to endure, to raise a family without the help of a man. The reader, like the narrator, can pity Madame Fourchette, but neither likes nor admires her. It is much easier to feel warmth for the wealthy and talented Mrs. Hearst, who only plays at farming (and who later retires with her husband to Vancouver).

Williams's treatment of her protagonist similarly privileges Anglo-Canadian life above peasant life. Marie Fourchette rapidly abandons the vulgar ways of her people for the refined life of the English upper class. She learns to read and write, adopts English dress and manners[13], marries a wealthy, upper-class Englishman and moves with her husband to Vancouver. Marie, however, is not of genuine peasant stock. Part way through the novel the reader learns that she is the illegitimate daughter of the upper-class Belgian for whom her

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[13]When Marie says good-bye to her sweetheart, who is going off to war, she imitates the English ladies who bravely send their soldiers away without a tear. "She would be worthy of her English soldier" (149).

mother worked before she was married. It is surely more than coincidence that Connor's Kalman Kalmar also comes from "good" blood; his mother was a Russian lady who gave up wealth and rank to work for her country. "You are not of these cattle [the partying Galicians]. Your mother was a lady" (77-8), Kalman's father proudly tells his son. There is an obvious connection between the upper-class ancestry of these protagonists and their status within the novels as "good" foreigners who are easily assimilated. The Canadian standards to which they aspire are not wholly British in origin, but represent the values of an increasingly international culture divorced from its peasant roots.

Two other homesteading romances, Love in Manitoba (1911) by Anglo-Canadian novelist E. Antony Wharton Gill and The Viking Heart (1923) by Icelandic-Canadian Laura Goodman Salverson, similarly view assimilation as desirable, but are more sympathetic to the intrinsic merits of foreign cultures. Both novels, like The Foreigner and New Furrows, value hard work and prosperity as important measures of success, but portray these values as compatible with the Scandinavian peasant cultures of their protagonists. Although they acknowledge the superior power of British culture, they also recognize that the major status distinction between foreign immigrants and Anglo-Canadians is the result more of difference in class than in ethnic background.

One reason for the Scandinavian immigrant's acceptability as a homesteader stems from the similarity between British and Scandinavian ancestral roots. Canadians who dismiss Icelanders as unlettered savages, the Icelandic minister in The Viking Heart notes, reveal an abysmal ignorance of the tie that binds the two cultures:

> "What shall we say of the education of an Englishman who does not know who his next neighbour in the North Sea is? What does he know of his own

> history if he is not aware how closely we are knit in ties of blood? How much more fit is he, do you think, in a battle of wits against us if he does not know that in fighting us he is fighting the same qualities which made England great?" (112)

Although some of Salverson's Icelandic settlers experience prejudice from Anglo-Canadians, the public response to Scandianian immigrants on the prairies was generally favourable. Those same qualities "which made England great" made them progressive homesteaders who assimilated easily with Anglo-Saxon people. "Taken all in all there is no class of immigrants that are as certain of making their way in the Canadian West as the people of the peninsula of Scandinavia," A. L. Ford observes. "Accustomed to the rigors of a northern climate, clean-blooded, thrifty, ambitious and hard-working, they will be certain of success in this pioneer country, where the strong, not the weak, are wanted" (Strangers Within Our Gate 77). Like the thrifty, industrious Icelanders who are "in every way excellent citizens" (80), these northern Europeans fit well into the dominant culture. Not surprisingly, then, the Swedish and Danish and Icelandic immigrants in Love in Manitoba and The Viking Heart easily become good Canadians.

The Swansons in Love in Manitoba are prototypes of the ideal foreign settler. Ole Swanson, first Reeve of his Rural Municipality and an influential voice in the community, had been "a small man" in Sweden, but in Canada his perseverance and hard work make him "a man of some importance, with his hundred and sixty acres of homestead, his big band of cattle, and the largest crop in the settlement" (22). He may not be as successful as Jim Hardie, Gill's idealized Canadian farmer, or as much a gentleman as the young Englishman Bert Enderby, but he is clearly an asset to the Canadian West. Like his socially ambitious

wife, who learns English in order to help her children, and his daughter Amanda, whose "impulsive disposition and quickness to learn" (24) distinguish her from her stolid schoolmates, Ole quickly becomes a valuable member of prairie society[14].

Gill's textual use of peasant dress, however, shows that social background as well as ethnic origin determine the status--and therefore the power--of new Canadians. Because the behavior and aspirations of his Scandinavian immigrants do not threaten the values of the dominant society, he can afford to be more generous than either Connor or Williams in his response to foreign culture. A comparison of the way in which he portrays Canadian versus peasant dress with Williams's comparable treatment of the same subject reveals his greater tolerance of ethnic diversity--and, at the same time, shows his recognition of the power embedded in the English-speaking middle and upper-middle class.

The adoption of Canadian dress in New Furrows symbolizes the assimilation of culturally-inferior peasant immigrants into a superior, essentially British society. When Marie arrives at Clovelly, Mrs. Hearst immediately plans to replace the girl's "ugly, heavy dress" with short-sleeved, cotton frocks in pastel colours and to exchange her coarse woolen stockings and "clumsy" (34) shoes for dainty white shoes and stockings. Williams's use of the word "ugly" not only assigns higher status to the fashionable dress of English ladies than to traditional peasant garb; it also privileges their domestic work and leisure activities above the agricultural labour of peasant women. Marie's clothing is appropriate to a woman who

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[14]Roland Vale, a handsome and charming remittance man, provides an excellent foil both to Ludwig Nielson, the ambitious young Danish immigrant who loves Amanda, and to the Scandinavian immigrants in general. Vale is English and comes from a "good" background, but he is a lazy, irresponsible individual who "has never done a hand's turn for himself in his life" (36). Gill does not imply that Scandinavian immigrants are superior to the English, but he does suggest that the English have no monopoly on either virtue or homesteading skills.

milks cows, hoes potatoes and works in the field. Her dark, heavy dress and stockings are warm and durable, and her stout shoes provide needed protection from stones and thistles. Pale blue cotton dresses, thin white stockings and elegant shoes are suitable for entertaining and for light housework, but would be entirely out of place in the barn and hayfield[15]. By replacing her heroine's practical peasant dress with fashionable English attire, Williams symbolically privileges the culture of Anglo-Canadians above the old world culture of European peasants.

Gill's treatment of dress, on the other hand, both endorses the values of a Scandinavian peasantry and exposes its vulnerability to the superior power of the ruling class. Although Jim Hardie, seeing Amanda Swanson for the first time in English clothing, is suddenly struck by her beauty and by her burgeoning womanhood, the narrator's description of her earlier peasant garb lacks the pejorative tone that chracterizes Connor's and Williams's comparable descriptions:

> At other times when he had seen her, she had usually worn the short print frocks in which she went to school, the grey home-knit stockings and stout boots, the neat handkerchief on her head, pinned beneath the chin, and the little square shawl over her shoulders--the peasant dress of the old land reproduced in all its national features in the settler's daughter of the new. (27)

Amanda's print frocks, shawls, head scarves, home-knit stockings and stout boots are not ugly, but are the functional clothing of a young woman who customarily works on the farm.

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[15]The adoption of Western dress is also a symbolically important part of assimilation in Nellie McClung's Painted Fires (1925). White shoes and fashionable dresses quickly transform Helmi Milander, a young Finnish immigrant, into a pretty Canadian girl.

Thus appropriately clad, she is both "natural and charming" (47) as she brings the cows home for milking and does other outdoor chores. Amanda adopts English dress on occasion, but unlike Irma Kalmar in The Foreigner, she does not feel compelled to discard the traditional costume of her people. When she plays tennis with Roland Vale, for example, she wears the headcovering that is part of her national dress. Amanda's natural beauty is enhanced rather than destroyed by this symbol of peasant attire; even Roland, accustomed to the fashionable beauty of upperclass Englishwomen, is impressed with her simple elegance:

> Roland had seen many gaudy vagaries in head-gear among the girls with whom he had played tennis at home, but never had he seen anything which seemed to him at once so quaint and yet so natural to the wearer as the simple Swedish handkerchief of whitest lawn, gathered to the form of her shapely head, by its ribbon of pink, the end of which nestled in a bow beneath her chin. (69)

Because Swedish culture does not violate Anglo-Canadian standards of progress, this symbol of national differences is acceptable, even charming. Amanda's beauty is not impaired by the "quaint" white handkerchief that is a reminder of her rustic background. Her peasant dress indicates, however, that her status is low in the social hierarchy. Her head scarves and shawls suggest to Roland Vale the illicit rights of feudal privilege--he can try to seduce her, as he did the English gamekeeper's daughter back home. Unlike the Canadian dress which empowers Irma Kalmar and protects her from dishonourable masculine attention, Amanda's costume symbolizes her vulnerability. It is a badge of the (relatively) powerless peasant class.

Salverson's novel depicts an immigrant people who earn their Canadian citizenship

by supplementing Icelandic peasant traditions with the social and economic ambition of the dominant culture. In her autobiography, Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter (1939), Salverson says that she wanted to tell a story which would express the spiritual values of the Icelandic immigrants and, at the same time, "define the price" (509) that they must pay for a place in the life of their new nation. This desire found expression in The Viking Heart, which traces the history of a small group of Icelandic immigrants in Manitoba. Since Icelandic and Anglo-Canadian values are similar, the novel suggests, assimilation for these settlers does not mean adopting a completely alien culture, but paying for prosperity and the rights of citizenship with the toil of their bodies and the blood of their young. The Icelanders are, of all peoples, "perhaps the most readily assimilated;" throughout their history they have "quickly taken on the ways and speech" of many nations without sacrificing the heritage of their Norse blood. "So will it be with us here," the Icelandic minister in Salverson's novel says. "Our children will be Canadians but our Norse nature will remain unchanged" (111). Her cast of Icelandic immigrants become doctors, teachers, dress designers, musicians, prosperous farmers and successful business people not because they adopt Canadian ways, as is the case in The Foreigner and New Furrows, but because they utilize the gifts of their own birthright. Salverson perceives no incompatibility between these two cultures, no conflict between loyalty to the old world or to the new. "I am not likely to forget the heritage of my fathers," says Thor Lindal, a second-generation Icelandic-Canadian, "but I can best prove my Norse blood by honoring this country which is mine" (294). Thor's death overseas during the War confirms the value of Icelandic-Canadians and enables his immigrant mother for the first time to think of Canada--this nation "which had demanded much of them" (325)--as home. Hard work and sacrifice, not the loss of their culture, make the Icelandic immigrants

truly Canadian.

Since part of Salverson's literary intent is to justify her race "as something more than a hewer of wood" (Confessions 521), the Icelandic people in The Viking Heart achieve not only economic success, but also a measure of greatness. Borga and Bjorn Lindal, the first-generation protagonists, become relatively prosperous farmers. Their children, however, rise above this humble station. Although Ninna marries a rich Anglo-Canadian and rejects her Icelandic roots (a course of which the narrative voice disapproves), the other children succeed without severing their ties with the Icelandic community. Elizabeth becomes a prominent fashion designer and her husband becomes a musician whose songs "will help to re-light the extinguished candle of Iceland's ancient glory" (236). Thor becomes a doctor and his Icelandic-Canadian wife becomes first a teacher and then a nurse. "There is but one hope, one liberator for the poor," the Icelandic minister says. "It is education" (111). Salverson's protagonists adopt this route to success. Perhaps, in the process, they lose touch with "ordinary" people. Terrence Craig suggests that The Viking Heart does little to combat discrimination against foreign immigrants because Salverson refuses to take a stand against the concept of cultural superiority. Instead, he says, "[h]er immigrant novels and her autobiography were in large part trying to establish Icelanders and other Scandinavians in the same superior category as Britons" (71). Implicit in this attitude is the denigration not only of those people who remain "hewers of wood," but also of their occupations. By privileging artists and professional people above tillers of the soil and sea, Salverson helps to strengthen the split between Nature and culture that characterizes twentieth-century civilization.

Salverson's treatment of clothing, like that of her literary colleagues, emphasizes the importance of fashion as an icon of power. Elizabeth Lindal's adoption of stylish dress

symbolizes her metamorphosis from prim, modest countrywoman to influential arbiter of fashionable taste. When she returns from studying design in Chicago she is "a very changed" woman: "All the restraint, the backwardness, which had hindered her progress and popularity, had disappeared" (256). Her family and friends-- even her lovely sister Ninna-- stand in awe before the "impregnable armor" (257) of her pretty clothes and easy manner. Fashionable dress - the dress of wealthy Canadian and American and European women of high status, rather than simply Canadian dress, confers power in The Viking Heart.

Although The Foreigner, New Furrows, Love in Manitoba and The Viking Heart were doubtlessly read primarily for their entertainment value, these works of popular fiction served also as emissaries for their culture. Their message was clear: foreign immigrants must adopt the values and practices of English-speaking settlers in order to achieve acceptance, respectability and power. The Foreigner and New Furrows point out the superiority of British civilization to primitive peasant cultures and portray assimilation as the key to social and economic success. Love in Manitoba and The Viking Heart validate Scandinavian culture, but minimize its "otherness" in order to highlight its compatibility with the Anglo-Canadian ideology of progress. In their emphasis upon the values of the dominant culture they helped to obliterate the oppositional values of a peasantry which viewed land as sacred, and thus strengthened the Western imperative of human dominion over Nature.

Chapter Twelve

To Rival the Power of the Gods: The Industrialization of Agriculture in Robert Stead's Grain

> [Technology] grows from the desire to rival the awesome, unfathomable creativity of the earth. This is where domination of nature begins.
> - John Zerzan and Alice Carnes, "Technology: Its History and Our Future," 1991[1]

Although Robert Stead was critical of the greed and crass materialism that marred his utopian vision of Western agricultural development, the Manitoba-born journalist viewed with complacency human sins against the natural world. His poetry and fiction, like the work of his contemporaries, reflect the anthropocentric arrogance that characterized Euro-Canadian settlement of the prairies. Stead's earliest novels pay tribute to the homesteaders who used the horse and plough to subdue the wild, untilled land. By the time Grain was published in 1926, however, the oxen and draft horses that had transformed wilderness to wheatfields were being replaced by the gasoline-powered engines of the industrial era. Grain takes place during this transition. Its hero's fascination with the power of machines and his ultimate decision to leave the farm for a mechanic's job in the city suggest the important role that mechanization plays in the novel. Grain is a celebration, albeit a sometimes ambivalent celebration, of the industrialization of Western agriculture.

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[1]p. 12.

Stead's earlier novels establish the sacred nature of the pioneer farmer's mission to bend the untamed prairie to human will. Although they denounce the materialism that soon debased its purity, their description of early homestead life depicts its sacramental quality. In The Homesteaders (1916), for example, the narrator notes the spiritual significance in the protagonist's task of breaking "new" land: "There was something almost sacred in the bringing of his will to bear upon soil which had come down to him through all the ages fresh from the hand of the Creator" (67). The protagonist in Dennison Grant (1920) echoes this faith in Western man's mission to subdue the earth. As Grant watches the sod roll beneath his plough, he feels that he is engaged in "a rite of almost sacramental significance":

> "To take a substance straight from the hand of the creator and be the first in all the world to impose a human will upon it is surely an occasion for solemnity and thanksgiving," he soliloquized. "How can anyone be so gross as to see only materialism in such work as this? Surely it has something of fundamental religion in it! Just as from the soil springs all physical life, may it not be that deep down in the soil are, some way, the roots of the spiritual?" (291)

Grant gives spiritual significance to what, in another culture, might reluctantly be considered a necessary desecration of sacred earth. Although he is conscious of the soil's importance in feeding people, it is the thought of imposing human will upon the natural world that captures his imagination. Like Frank Hall, Stead's protagonist in Neighbours (1922), Grant views his action as enabling him to be co-creator with God. "There is something almost sacramental in turning over the fresh sod of the prairies--sod which no plow, no human hand, has ever turned before," Frank Hall observes as he starts to spade land for his first garden. "If you have a mind for serious thinking it brings you very close to your Creator" (76). Frank feels

humble as he stops to look over the vast expanse of his quarter section. Creating a garden makes him one with his Creator, and the hand tool interposes little distance between himself and the pristine earth; using a spade to break the acres of sod, however, shows him how puny is human effort. Although even the simple technology of a spade allows the farmer to make potatoes and turnips grow in the wilderness, only the more sophisticated power of the plough will enable him to alter significantly the native pattern of the prairie ecosystem.

In his poem "The Plough" (published in 1923 in The Empire Builders), Stead describes the essential role that the plough played in the agricultural development of the West. The early stanzas describe the desolation of a prairie wilderness that lay ". . . silent, useless, and unused" (31) prior to the advent of European settlement. Then the homesteader enters with his plough:

> Straightway the silent plain
> Grew mellow with the glow of golden grain;
> The axes in the solitary wood
> Rang out where stately oak and maple stood;
> The land became alive with busy din,
> And as the many settled, more came in. . . . (33-38)

This picture of prosperity following in the wake of the plough contains a dark side which Stead explores in several of his novels, but in his ode to the plough he describes only the blessings that ensue. The "lazy bison" (49) and the "silent red-man" (65) who inhabited the wilderness have been replaced by the farms and villages and cities of a burgeoning civilization, and the land is now filled with "peace and plenty" (66), with "loyal friends and happy homes" (71), and with the rich culture that follows in "the feet of trade" (72). It would

be easy for a cynic to conclude that this poem is little more than unofficial propaganda for the Department of Immigration and Colonization, whose publicity staff Stead joined in 1919. His novels and poems, however, reflect the general euphoria that characterized prairie literature prior to the fiction of Martha Ostenso and Frederick Philip Grove. Anglo-Canadians, secure in the faith that Western colonization would bring untold benefits to the entire nation, viewed the extension of their civilization across the prairies with buoyant optimism. Stead's ode to the mouldboard plough was a fitting tribute to the implement that unlocked the "boundless treasure" ("The Plough" 8) of grassland soil.

By the time Stead wrote Grain, however, the horse-drawn plough had been widely replaced by massive tillage implements pulled by gasoline-powered tractors. The action of his novel, which spans the period from 1896 to the early years of the 1920s, takes place during this transition from horsepower to the power of machines. High wheat prices and increased demand for Western grain during the First World War had encouraged farmers to expand their holdings and to adopt newly-introduced farm technology (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 312). The gasoline-powered tractor, already well established in the West by the end of the War, gained public acceptance so rapidly that it was in general use by the late 1920s (Fowke 81). The combine and the farm truck were introduced in the early years of the 1920s and were widely used by the end of the decade (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 319). By 1931 there were 81,659 tractors, 8,897 combines and 21,517 trucks in use in the prairie provinces (Fowke 81). Stead's novel takes place during this period of dramatic growth in the industrialization of agriculture.

The protagonist's fascination with the power of machines and his ultimate departure from the farm for a mechanic's job in the city establish industrialization as a major theme of

Stead's seventh novel. Grain is the story of an ordinary man whose heroic quest is for the wisdom and courage to live honourably. Gander Stake loves horses, farming, machines--and his neighbour Josephine Burge. Although he is too inarticulate and shy to tell her of his love, they both know that they will marry one day. Then the War breaks out and Gander alienates his patriotic sweetheart when he stays at home to raise wheat. She marries a man who is invalided home from the War, and Gander buries himself in his work. Several years later, however, he faces a moral dilemma. Dare he remain near Jo, who still loves him, or should he follow his sister Minnie's advice and accept the offer of a mechanic's job in the city? In the passage which, as Eric Thompson notes, might well have dicated the publisher's choice of title ("Robert Stead" 249), Minnie compares the choices that people make to the output of a threshing machine: "I have often thought life is like a thresher, pouring out its cloud of straw and chaff and dust, and a little grain. A little hard, yellow, golden grain, that has in it the essence of life, Gander!" (204). Gander's painful decision to behave honourably by leaving the farm is the "golden grain" that establishes his moral stature and makes him the unsung hero of the novel. The word "grain" thus gives a dual meaning to the title. Grain is both a story about the mechanization of farming and a story about a man whose integrity compells him to seek work in the city. Central to both stories is the machine.

In spite of his enthusiasm for agricultural progress, Stead was aware of the costs inherent both in prosperity and in mechanization. Greed and selfishness and spiritual complacency accompanied the growing acquisition of wealth; rural depopulation and increased farm costs bore witness to the impact of industrialization. The following passage from The Homesteaders expresses the concern that pervades all Stead's fiction: progress is a double-edged sword that brings both blessings and destruction. By the time the first flood of

immigration had ended, the idealism that had characterized the original pioneers had been replaced by pragmatic materialism:

> Railways had supplanted ox-cart and bob-sleigh as the freighters of the plains; the farmer read his daily paper on the porch after supper, while his sons and daughters drove to town in "top" buggies, tailor-made suits, and patent-leather shoes. The howl of the coyote had given way to the whistle of the locomotive; beside the sod hut of earlier days rose the frame or brick house proclaiming prosperity or social ambition. The vast sweep of the horizon, once undefiled by any work of man, was pierced and broken with elevators, villages, and farm buildings, and the whiff of coal smoke was blown down the air which had so lately known only the breath of the prairies. The wild goose no longer loitered in the brown fields in spring and autumn, and the wild duck had sought the safety of the little lakes. The pioneer days had passed away, and civilization and prosperity were rampant in the land. There were those, too, who thought that perhaps the country had lost something in all its gaining; that perhaps there was less idealism and less unreckoning hospitality in the brick house on the hill than there once had been in the sod shack in the hollow. (85-6)

Was Stead an environmentalist out of step with his time? Did he mourn the loss of an "undefiled" horizon, the presence of coal smoke in the air, the absence of wild geese and ducks in the sloughs of prairie settlements? Or did he, like William Butler, regretfully acknowledge the loss of limitless freedom and a wild, pristine land as a necessary price to pay for the greater good of economic development? I suggest that the latter is a more

accurate reading of Stead's work. Like many of his contemporaries, his sadness at the passing of the old order is overshadowed by his faith in Western civilization. He deplores the desecration of the prairie by agricultural development, as Douglas Durkin regrets the destruction of its peace and beauty by railroads and copper mines, but he does not question the wisdom of development itself. Stead's novels reflect nostalgic longing for the purity and idealism of early pioneer life; they cannot, however, be read as a condemnation of modernism or of human-centred Anglo-Canadian culture.

Because Grain evinces a similar awareness of the side-effects of mechanization, it would be easy to read it, too, as a critique of industrialization. Stead's description of the evolution of Jackson Stake's farm, for example, shows a clear understanding of the social and economic costs of progress. Mechanization meant that fewer people were needed to farm the land and that the surplus population had to move to the city. It also meant that farmers had to purchase costly machinery even though they could not pay for it from the revenue of increased wheat production. Like Jackson Stake, the prairie farmer was as much victim as beneficiary of political and technological developments beyond his control:

> . . . Jackson enlarged his stables and barns; abandoned the twenty-acre field idea which he had transplanted from his early eastern environment to the broad measures of the west, and now farmed his land by quarter-sections; abandoned the fourteen-inch single-furrow walking plough for two-and three-furrow sulky gangs; abandoned the broadcast seeder for the disc drill, and the six-foot binder for the eight; abandoned the grain sack for the bulk system of handling wheat; abandoned the old horse-power threshers whose metallic crescendo sang through the frosty autumn mornings of the 1880's for the

steam and gasoline of the twentieth century.

> Jackson Stake was but one unit in a hundred thousand who are making possible the great trek from the country to the city, a trek which never could have taken place but for the application of machinery to land, so that now one farmer may raise enough wheat to feed many hundreds of city dwellers. But if in this he was adding his weight to a gathering social and economic crisis he was quite oblivious to the fact; he saw no further than the need of bringing more land under cultivation, to grow more wheat; and even while he pursued this policy he would have told you that he lost money on every bushel of wheat he grew, and that it was the cows, the hogs, and the hens that held the farm together. (41)

Although his 480-acre farm (with 200 acres under cultivation) and his eight-foot binder may appear paltry in light of the enormous machinery and extensive land holdings of the 1990s, Jackson Stake is a prosperous farmer by the standards of the 1920s. His expanding cultivated acreage and his use of increasingly powerful machines are apparent signs of success. In reality, however, Jackson not only contributes to the social and economic crisis that results from the displacement of rural people by machines--a crisis that personally affects him when his son Jackie leaves the farm; he also experiences the financial consequences that accrue to the minor players in an economic system stacked against farmers[2].

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[2]Farmers are not the only people for whom the economic benefits of mechanization prove illusory. Although Bill Powers is "wearing out his third machine" in the service of prairie farmers, custom threshing has not rewarded him with financial sucess: "Nothin' on his place but a mortage" (48), Mrs. Stake notes emphatically.

Agricultural technology, as Stan Rowe notes, is not neutral. As well as displacing rural people and increasing the debt load of farmers, its use dicates the way land is used: ". . . its goals of efficiency and risk-reduction move farm practices from hoe-and-sickle to horse-drawn plough and reaper, then on to huge air-seeders, monster combines, massive doses of chemical fertilizers, dangerous biocides and all the other techniques that go with and justify large monocultural fields" (Home Place 22). As I point out in Chapter Eight, these farming practices have adversely affected the agricultural environment. Although their costs have been disguised as benefits by a dramatic increase in farm productivity, their extensive use now threatens the social and ecological health of rural communities.

Stead's awareness of the costs of mechanization, and of economic development in general, tints much of his work with nostalgia and colours his enthusiasm for the industrialization of agriculture with a certain ambivalence. Since Grain is also a more complex novel than earlier wilderness and homesteading romances, and Gander Stake a more fully-developed protagonist than the two-dimensional heroes of writers like Harold Bindloss, the author's ideological position is less simplistic than that of his contemporaries. Stead's zeal for mechanization is tempered by his intelligent assessment of its social and economic costs. His fascination with the power of machines, however, is evident in his portrayal of his central character, Gander Stake.

Gander's emotional identification with the machines that transform his environment is ironic in light of his strong sense of the prairie as home. ". . . never in all his days on the farm and the prairie did Gander know the pang of loneliness," the narrator says. "This was his native environment; he was no more lonely on these prairies than is the coyote or the badger" (56). Like the wildlife inhabitants of the prairie, Gander is instinctively at home in a

landscape still close to its natural state[3]. He hates school and books, preferring instead to immerse himself in the life of the farm, for Gander "was a farmer born and bred" (40). During the summer in which he is ten, he becomes teamster of the binder and mower, and starts to take a man's place on his father's farm. By the time he is eleven, he is a full-time farmer glorying in the "joy of accomplishment" (59) that comes with man's estate. Gander's brother Jackson might leave the farm for the lights of the city, and his sister Minnie might long for the ease and refinement of urban life, but Gander is determined to stay on the farm. Stead's desire to emphasize his hero's attachment to the land, indeed, led him to submit to his publisher two titles-- A Son of the Soil and A Soldier of the Soil--which highlight that connection (Thompson, "Robert Stead" 248)[4].

Gander's love for the land is so strong that it rivals even his youthful infatuation for Jo Burge. He assumes that he will someday marry Jo because that "would be the natural thing, and Gander lived close to nature" (120). His response to rain when he is herding cattle with Jo, however, suggests that the pull of the soil is stronger than his awakening sexual desire. Although he has been longing with adolescent fervour for an opportunity to be alone with her, a desire realized by the happy coincidence of their fathers' mutual decision to pasture cattle on the school quarter one summer day, and although Jo has just declared that she has always been his girl, Gander is not dismayed when a sudden squall of wind and rain interrupts their promising tête-a-tête and sends them both in pursuit of their milling cattle:

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[3]Davey suggests that Stead shifts from mocking Gander to respecting him because of "his enmeshment in the ancient and unconscious patterns of biological process" (11).

[4] Three of the remaining title suggestions--Aftermath, No Man's Orders and Half a Hero--emphasize the importance of Ganader's refusal to join the Canadian Forces overseas; the sixth, Gander, merely highlights the central role that the protagonist plays in the novel.

> Yet for the moment he was happy, and Jo was not uppermost in his thoughts. Here was rain, rain! Rain, the first love of every farmer, the bride of every dry, thirsty field, the mother of every crop that grows! Gander was a farmer. All his instincts were rooted deep in the soil. (79)

When the few drops of rain soon peter out, Jo comforts Gander with a sudden hug and a fleeting kiss on the cheek, then turns and gallops home with her cattle. Gander is too young to despair for long at the absence of rain, but he is ashamed of the timidity that kept him from kissing Jo and confused by the tumult of his tangled emotions. Then the rain finally comes, and he is soothed by the thought of its healing water soaking into the dry soil: "And, some way, it seemed to heal more than the hurt prairie, because Gander was at peace" (81). The maternal earth is able to provide emotional sustenance far more potent than the heady elixir of romantic love.

Gander's strong attachment to the land, however, is exceeded by his fascination with the power and romance of machines. From his boyhood infatuation with the steam engine to his adult love affair with the automobile, Gander idolizes the mechanical force that endows puny man with the power of giants. His relationship with machines is characterized less by pragmatic utilitarianism than by an intense emotional identification with the new technology that facilitates human dominion over Nature.

Gander's introduction to the enthralling world of mechanical power takes place when he becomes teamster of his father's mower and binder. These machines symbolically increase his strength and enable him to do the work of several dozen men. Turning out sheaves of wheat with the binder, the boy of ten is "the magician who slew those serried ranks of wheat in less time than a score of grown men with aching backs and swinging

cradles in the days of his grandfather" (45). The binder endows him with a supernatural power that enables him--a mere child--to participate in man's subjugation of Nature by slaying the "serried ranks" of wheat. Stead's metaphor, doubtlessly suggested by the Great War context of the novel, points to an important function of the machine. It enables humankind to play at being God.

Stead's use of military imagery emphasizes the wonderful power that this technology gives to humans. In a passage later in the novel Minnie watches the binder cut the wheat and happily imagines that the wheat plants are Germans and the knives Allies: "It was great fun watching them topple over, in whole regiments" (95). The binder gives the Western farmer similar power to subdue Nature and to wrest wealth from the soil. Frank Davey is mistaken when he suggests that Stead's use of a metaphor which makes a comparison between the work of the binder and the grim harvest of men on the European battlefields "severely qualifies the 'romance' Gander finds in his machines and suggests the emptiness of his fascination with them" (19). Far from indicating qualified approval of the machine, Stead's use of military language indicates his fascination with its potential for conquest over the land[5]. The author was a patriot who supported Canadian involvement in the War. His suggestion of Half a Hero as a possible title for the novel suggests that Gander's refusal to enlist in the war effort was less than praiseworthy. By metaphorically connecting agricultural technology to the Allies' military manuevers in a just war against Germany, Stead points to its strategic value in the human drive to dominate Nature.

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[5]David Carpenter also makes this point in his discussion of Grain.

The narrator's description of his protagonist's boyhood encounter with Bill Powers's[6] threshing outfit as it lumbers down the road to the Stake farm further emphasizes the important role that power plays in Gander's love affair with the machine. Its glamour and mystique soon supplant both the land and Jo Burge in Gander's youthful imagination. Although a full moon casts its romantic glow over the autumn landscape and although he is walking hand-in-hand with his girl, Gander is moved by the magic of the steam engine rather than by either beauty or love:

> . . . here was something that stirred him deeply--the romance of machinery, of steam, which at the pull of a lever turned loose the power of giants! He watched until it had gone over the hill.
>
> "I'm goin' to run one o' those some day, you see if I don't," he whispered to Josephine, and his words were the confession of a great and secret yearning, as that of a young artist who gives his dearest friend a glimpse of his ambitions.

Only a few lines earlier the narrator told us that the machine can thresh "in a dozen hours the wheat to feed a hundred families for a year" (54). In identifying himself with an engine that exerts this power "of giants," Gander allies himself, however unconsciously, with the forces of Western development. Later, when he becomes fireman for Powers's outfit, his initiation into the rites of the steam engine signals his entry into a new world of "great activity and accomplishment" (98), and he feels the power for which he has yearned since boyhood. The day on which he first fires Bill's straw-burner is the day on which he first experiences the

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[6]Stead doubtlessly intended the pun on Powers's name.

exhilarating power of the gods:

> Gander let her ramble gently for a few revolutions while the exhaust beat its plesant tattoo inside the stack, then slowly gave her more steam while he watched the quickening flywheel and knew the thrill that comes only to those who hold great power in the hollow of their hands. (101)

This lust for power similarly motivates Gander's fantasies about becoming a locomotive driver; the sight of an engineer sitting in his cab, a lever in his hand, overwhelms him with awe: "That was power for you! That was life!" (124). And when his father buys a car during the third year of the War, Gander "thrill[s] to [its] power" (145) as he races it up the road. His love of machines is inspired by what Lewis Mumford calls a "myth of unqualified power" in which science promises the human animal "increasing omnipotence, if not omniscience" (17). By harnessing their power, pioneer man could tame and dominate the vast, apparently boundless prairie land.

Gander's love affair with machines not only elevates him above Nature in an anthropocentric hierarchy dominated by man; its also isolates him from people and leads him to seek pleasure in the mechanical arms of a straw-burning steam thresher. Having grown up in a household in which the members "hid their sentiment from each other and held it a weakness to show any sign of family affection" (63), Gander is handicapped in his relationships. As a boy he "ha[s] no words" (52) in which to express his love for Josephine. Later, when Jo angrily dismisses him for his failure to join the Canadian forces, he takes refuge in the solitary life of the farm: "He ploughed and harrowed early and late, and found his companionship with his horses and machinery" (134). Because Gander cannot interact well with people, he resorts to the company of animals and inanimate machines. The long

days and hard work of firing Bill Powers's steam engine are not onerous because "he loved his engine and delighted in its company" (98). Stead's use of sexual imagery in his description of Gander's relationship to the threshing machine, indeed, suggests its function as substitute for woman. Gander loses Jo not only because he is unwilling to join the Allies overseas, but also because he gives emotional priority to machines. When he fires up the steam engine and thrills to its throbbing in his hands, this shy, awkward man realizes that here is power that he can control. No wonder he talks to his engine with the voice of a lover:

> Gander's first act was always to place his hand on the boiler, as one might reassure a nervous horse. By the same half-caressing touch he gauged the coldness of the night and the temperature of the water. Then . . . he cleared the firebox and ash pan.
>
> "Well, how's the old girl th' smornin'?" Gander would say, as he raked the ash pan clean. "Ready for another day's run? I bet we are. Water pretty low, eh? . . . She'll go up again when she gets hot. Ready for a bit o' fire?"

Gander thrusts a small armful of burning straw into the firebox of his engine and nurses the flames until the smoke is billowing out of the stack overhead. Then come long minutes of "gentle stoking, coaxing the fire to its maximum heat" (99) and waiting until the steam pressure builds up. Later, watching the quickening flywheel, he knows that this mastery of the machine is more important to him than his sweetheart: "Jo Burge? This-- this power--this mighty thing that sprang at his touch--this was life!" (101). He gladly exchanges the emotionally-challenging pleasures of sex and companionship for the less-demanding pleasure of mastering the machine.

Gander's subsequent decision to leave the farm is not a rejection of industrialized agriculture but an exchange of steam engines and tractors for motor cars and pick-up trucks.

Although several critics have attacked the novel's "seriously flawed ending" (Saunder ix), I would argue that it is consistent with the protagonist's stolid integrity and with his overwhelming love of machines.

Gander's sudden flight from the farm is motivated by the knowledge that Jo, married to another man, still loves him. Having just learned of his older brother's reprehensible behavior in seducing a young woman and then abandoning both the woman and their infant child, he is determined that he will not further dishonour the family name. "Sometimes it is the brave man that runs away . . ." (204), he says to Minnie. Gander puts the temptation of Jo's love behind him by leaving for the city on the morning train. His decision is not prompted, as McCourt suggests it is, by a sudden "realization of his inadequacies" (99) under the influence of the beautiful, sophisticated Geraldine Chansely. Although he becomes aware that her education and quick wit give Jerry "the superior force" and that in some way she is "stronger than he" (150), Gander does not go to the city in order to follow her suggestion that he get an education and improve himself. His decision is based upon the moral certainty that honour demands a retreat.

Thomas Saunder's argument that the loss of Jo would drive Gander to seek consolation in the land is equally unconvincing. "If ever a character belonged on the farm," Saunders says, "it was he. . . . The loss of Gander's one love should have led him to lose himself, not in the city, but in his other love, the land" (ix-x). Gander, however, has yet another passion. He "like[s] working about machines" (207), as he tells Jo in a final hasty note to her. Saunders and McCourt both emphasize Gander's undeniable love of the land and question the realism of an ending in which he leaves the farm which "has first claim on his heart" (McCourt 99); they disregard the equal claim which machines make on his affections. Although Gander is, admittedly, "a farmer born and bred" (Grain 40), he is also a natural

mechanic. Within a week of his father's purchase of a car, he has probed its depths and discovered its secrets: "Within a week Gander had ferreted into its innermost parts, without destroying any vital organs. He knew every gradation of its most whimsical mood before his father could distinguish between a cylinder knock and a flat tire" (136). For such a man, surely the prospect of becoming a mechanic is not too dreadful a fate--especially when that prospect involves the possibility of further acquaintance with the fascinating Geraldine.

Gander's decision to leave the farm, however, makes Grain one of the first in a long line of prairie novels which display, in David Carpenter's words, a "severely qualified, lukewarm affection for the terrestrial home of its authors" (111). The ending is not unconvincing, but it is indicative of a changed attitude towards farming in the decades after the War. The heroic, manly farmers who graced the pages of Harold Bindloss's homesteading fiction gave place to stolid, insensitive men like Ostenso's Caleb Gare and Grove's John Elliot. The rural life associated with images of "purity and productiveness" (Friesen, Canadian Prairies 304) at the turn of the century degenerated, in the popular imagination, into images of boring work and mind-numbing routine. Prairie culture, like culture elsewhere in Canada, had adopted the social and technological standards of urban life.

Since this emerging, essentially international industrial culture destroys the age-old bond between humans and the natural world, it is symbolically appropriate that Gander leaves the farm. Mechanization has already severed his intimate connection with the land and replaced it with the thrill of human mastery. Soon it will create a new, artificial world dominated by technological achievements. This new environment, as Jacques Ellul notes about technological society in general, is "radically different from the natural world":

> The world that is being created by the accumulation of technical means. . . . destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world, and does not allow this world to restore itself or even to enter into a symbiotic relation with it. The two worlds obey different imperatives, different directives, and different laws which have nothing in common. Just as hydroelectric installations take waterfalls and lead them into conduits, so the technical milieu absorbs the natural. We are rapidly approaching the time when there will be no longer any natural environment at all. (43)

What place would Gander, who grew up living "close to nature" (Grain 120), have in this brave, new world? Are not the wheatfields and brome/alfalfa meadows as unnatural as the lawns and stately elm trees of the city? Perhaps, as Laurence Ricou suggests, Stead unconsciously reflected the human alienation that resulted from the growing mechanization of prairie agriculture: ". . . as man gains increasing control over his physical environment through technology, he becomes, in the pages of fiction, increasingly out of harmony with that environment. It would seem that as the machine makes the task of working the harsh land easier, the pioneer's need for the sustaining myth of of an eternally beneficent land becomes less urgent" (Vertical Man 37). Mechanization, by blurring the boundaries between the natural and the civilized world, blurs the important distinctions between country and city. Jackson Stake's cultivated fields are no more part of Butler's "great lone land" than are urban parks and gardens. Stead views with regret the migration from the country to the city, a movement which would not have taken place "but for the application of machinery to land" (Grain 41), but he sees it as both inevitable and necessary. Western man, inheritor of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, must subdue wild Nature and establish his dominion over the

bountiful earth.

Stead's nostalgia for a more idealistic pioneer past does nothing to negate his enthusiasm for the technological progress of his own day. Although he is critical of the materialism that tarnished the homesteaders' dream, he does not make a clear conection between mechanization and the "dynamically unstable" (Illich 49) nature of an industrial system driven by unceasing expansion and the creation of limitless human need. Grain is not a critique of an industrialized agricultural economy fueled simultaneously by greed and the desire for legitimate profit. It is the story of an ordinary young man compelled by his integrity to flee the farm for a mechanic's job in the city. It is the story of his passion for machines. It is the story, finally, of the mechanization of agriculture and of Western man's endless quest for the power of the gods.

Chapter Thirteen

In Search of Community, Part I: The Feminine Quest in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Arthur Stringer's Prairie Trilogy and the Fiction of Nellie McClung.

> Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free.
>
> - Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics[1]

In contrast to Western man's quest for wealth and power is woman's oppositional quest for spiritual harmony and for a symbiotic, mutually nurturing relationship between humans and the land. Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer and Martha Ostenso depict in their fiction the different ways in which rural women pursue this common quest. Although these women share their culture's belief in human supremacy over the natural world, they differ significantly from the majority of men in homesteading fiction by privileging nurturing relationships above the exploitative relationships that characterize prairie agriculture. Nellie McClung's female protagonists serve as compassionate caregivers who view the land as a

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[1]qtd. in Plant, "Growing Home" ix.

resource that provides sustenance--not wealth--for its human inhabitants. The heroine of Arthur Stringer's prairie trilogy condemns her husband's obsession with money and power, and proposes an alternative ideology based upon love of family and home. The central female character in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese severs a passionate bond to the earth when she leaves her father's northern Manitoba farm; her flight to the city is not so much rejection of the land as it is rebellion against patriarchal tyranny. In their common opposition to an androcentric culture based on power over women and the land, the protagonists in these novels illustrate the feminine quest for healing community and for harmony between humans and their prairie home.

Homesteading, like railroad building, mining development and law enforcement, has its roots in a patriarchal social system which privileges physical strength and the will to dominate above the "feminine" skills of nurturing and cooperation. Since patriarchal authority is based upon the socially legitimated power to control and is "unmodified by emotive connectedness or compassion" (Jones 121), whereas feminist authority is based upon the valuation of connectedness and human community (Jones 126-7), ecofeminists rightly conclude that planetary survival requires a paradigm change in favour of "feminine" values. They note the interdependent nature of all life and the connection between the human and non-human members of an ecosystem. "This deep connectedness with all things translates into compassion," Starhawk says, "our ability to feel with and identify with others--human beings, natural cycles and processes, animals and plants" ("Feminist, Earth-based Spirituality" 178). It allows humans to experience all oppression--the destruction of forests, the obliteration of aboriginal culture--as part of their own hurt and loss. Ideally implemented, this "feminine" power does not preclude the power of others, but encourages

its full development within the context of a supportive community. A sense of commmunity, however, is notably absent from most homesteading fiction. Like the railroad builders and mine entrepreneurs in Douglas Durkin's The Heart of Cherry McBain and The Lobstick Trail, the homesteader pits his strength and his will against the forces of Nature in a solitary battle for supremacy. In the process he alienates himself from other humans and from the land. Implicit in an ecofeminist reading of Wild Geese, Arthur Stringer's prairie trilogy and the fiction of Nellie McClung is a recognition of the limitations of this patriarchal culture and of the need for an oppositional, "feminine" ideology based upon nurturing community and harmony with the natural world.

It would be a mistake to conclude that these authors envisioned an ecocentric society. Instead, like their fellow settlers, they firmly believed that the unbroken prairie existed to serve Euro-Canadian immigrants. Nellie McClung's memory of her father turning fields of grass into fields of wheat illustrates the anthropocentrism behind the prevailing image of the homesteader's "noble" mission:

> I had walked proudly behind my father, in the clean new furrows in my bare feet, as he broke the new sod on our farm, and as the coulter cut the sod, and the share turned it over, I knew he was doing something more than just plowing a field. I knew there was a significance in what he was doing, though I had no words to express it. I knew this was what the land had been waiting for all these long years. It was for this that the rain had fallen on it in summer and the snows had covered it in winter. It was for this the grass had grown on it, withered, and grown again, that some day someone would come and claim it, not for himself alone but for all people, claim it in the name of humanity

> and press it into humanity's service, stamping and sealing it forever with the broad signature of the plow. (Clearing in the West 116)

A child of the early settlement era, McClung had no way of foreseeing the ecological consequences of human use of the plough. She could not know that soil erosion, loss of organic matter and other evidence of ecosystem degradation would follow in its wake. Like the narrator in Arthur Stringer's prairie trilogy, she admires the noble women and men who are "making a great new country out of what was once a wilderness" (Prairie Wife 60). The arrogance of this Eurocentrism permeates her novels, as well as the work of her contemporaries. McClung, Stringer and Ostenso are critical, however, of the role that patriarchal man plays in creating the new social order. Their novels expose the limitations of an ideology based upon personal ambition and power, and propose that the "feminine" qualities of connectedness and compassion are essential to the creation of a utopian society in the West.

Arthur Stringer's prairie trilogy establishes a moral dichotomy that privileges the "feminine" qualities of nurturing, connectedness and compassion above "masculine" ambition for wealth and power. As their titles imply, The Prairie Wife (1915), The Prairie Mother (1920) and The Prairie Child (1922) are novels that focus on domestic relationships. Chaddie McKail, the protagonist and narrator, defines herself as "so essentially a family woman" that she cannot imagine life "without its home circle" (Prairie Child 201). Her husband, on the other hand, is a farmer-turned-speculator/entrepreneur who idealizes economic success. The narrative voice is critical of Duncan's materialism and hunger for power, and proposes an alternative ideology based upon domestic love and fidelity to home and family. An ecofeminist reading of the novels suggests a connection between this respect

for human relationships and respect for land, and proposes that the nurturing bonds of family relationships must be extended to the broader community if pioneer settlers are to make the prairies genuinely home.

Chaddie's account of her years on the prairies, summarized in a journal entry near the end of the trilogy, reflects the important role of husband and children in her life. These relationships, not material success, have been the mainstay of her existence:

> I married young and put a stop to those romantic adventurings which enrich the lives of most girls and enlighten the days of many women. I married a man and lived with him in a prairie shack, and sewed and baked for him, and built a new home and lost it, and began over again. I had children, and saw one of them die, and felt my girlhood slip away, and sold butter and eggs, and loved the man of my choice and cleaved to him and planned for my children, until I saw the man of my choice love another woman. And still I clung to my sparless hulk of a home, hoping to hold close about me the children I had brought into the world. . . . (Prairie Child 243)

In this bald account of her homesteading years, Chaddie sums up the glory and the tragedy of her life. Although she cannot look back on many tangible accomplishments, and although her marriage has been an unhappy one, she realizes that she has experienced the "big" (244) things of life: joy, hope, love, sorrow, birth and death. Marriage and motherhood have given meaning to a life defined by human relationships. When Duncan loses all their money in unsuccessful property speculation, earlier in the trilogy, she can cheerfully assure him that he is far more important to her than any amount of assets:

> ". . . I was never hungry for money. The one thing I've always been hungry

> for is love. What'd be the good of having a millionaire husband if he looked like a man in a hair-shirt on every occasion when you asked for a moment of his time? And what's the good of life if you can't crowd a little affection into it?" (Prairie Mother 45)

These words constitute Chaddie's statement of belief. Since love and affection are the two greatest goods in her canon of values, she can bear with equanimity the loss of money, house and land. What she does find hard to endure is the loss of her husband's love.

Chaddie's "gradual disillusionment with western life" (Thompson, Prairie Novel 189) is not, as Eric Thompson implies, the result of her disenchantment with the harsh prairies; rather, it is the result of her disappointment with the cruel reality of patriarchal love. Love--for woman, for children, for land--ranks near the bottom in Duncan's value hierarchy. Power and success, he tells Chaddie near the end of the second novel, are the most important things in a man's life:

> "When you get to where I am you don't find love loooming so large on the horizon. . . . What you want then . . . is power, success, the consolation of knowing you're not a failure in life. **That's** the big issue, and that's the stake men play big for, and play hard for." (Prairie Mother 277)

Although Chaddie is certainly not averse to "success," she is unwilling to sacrifice her husband and children in order to achieve it. Duncan, however, lets "vaulting ambition . . . o'erleap itself" and crush both family and honour. His unkindness, not Nature's cruelty, makes Chaddie unhappy.

Duncan's ambition, unbridled by either compassion or a sense of connection to the natural world, causes him to dishonour both the land and other humans by using them as

mere stepping-stones to his success. He views the West as a "stored-up granary of wealth" (Prairie Wife 141) and himself as a general "plotting out a . . . plan of campaign" (Prairie Wife 138). Farming becomes "a battle" (Prairie Wife 221) in which he risks his farm, his fortune and his family for the high stakes of wealth and power-- "big words," Chaddie notes sadly, "in the language of any man" (Prairie Mother 27). Although he does ultimately prosper, his success is bought at the price of his relationships with his wife and children and with his land. Because his wheatfields are only a source of money, he can easily discard them for lucrative investments in Alberta coal mines and Calgary real estate. Because his business interests are more important than people, he can use personal relationships to further his ambition. Duncan lets Chaddie run the farm alone while he pursues real estate speculations in Calgary and Vancouver, lobbies for a railway-right-of-way in Winnipeg and Ottawa and works as ranch manager for his influential cousin. He deliberately cultivates that lady's love in order to gain support for some profitable land transactions, then returns to his wife when he has achieved his end. He tries to mold his son into a model of himself, risking the child's happiness "for the sake of knowing [the boy's] wagon was to be hitched to the star of success" (Prairie Child 87). Finally, when his upward climb is momentarily blocked by a man who blackballs him from Calgary's prestigious Country Club, he financially ruins his opponent in revenge for thwarted ambition. Duncan, as his wife ruefully admits, has always "hankered after worldly success" and always worshipped the "god of Power" (Prairie Child 87). This idolatry makes him indifferent to the welfare of others and allows him to pursue his quest unhampered by moral scruples.

Chaddie's maternal devotion and her spiritual affiliation with the land[2] render her particularly vulnerable to Duncan's unkindness. Like the prairie, "glorious, and at the same time pathetic" in its willingness "to give, to yield up, to surrender all that is asked of it" (Prairie Wife 251), she becomes a servant who can be cast aside when no longer needed, a commodity to be used and then tossed away. Like the farm which Duncan exchanges for coal mines and real estate, she can be replaced (by another woman) when her husband tires of her. Her vulnerability is not the result of personal weakness, but of the patriarchal structure of a society that refuses to value "feminine" strengths. Chaddie is not a meek handmaiden, but an intelligent, opinionated woman who has enormous zest for life. She is marginalized, however, by a culture that privileges wealth and power above domestic life. Like the English public schools which her husband praises, patriarchy values manly independence above "home ties":

> . . . he had once said that the greatness of England depended on her public-schools . . . and that she had been the best colonizer in the world because her boys had been taken young and taught not to overvalue home ties, had been made manlier by getting off with their own kind instead of remaining hitched to an apron-string. (Prairie Child 25)

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[2]Chaddie is, admittedly, inconsistent in her affirmations of prairie life. Although she rejects California and New York and affluent Calgary for the "spiritually satisfying" (Prairie Child 46) life of the West, she wants the benefits of urban culture for her son. This uncertainty does not necessarily "undercut our belief in her," as Thompson says it does (Prairie Novel 193); it merely indicates the ambivalence that humans often feel toward the people and things they love. The conclusion of the trilogy, on the other hand, supports my contention that Chaddie is commited to her prairie farm. She leaves Duncan when she learns that he is planning to divorce her for another woman, and returns home with her children. There she will be able to enjoy both rural life and urban refinement by marrying Peter Ketley, a wealthy, educated writer who has settled on a neighbouring farm.

Chaddie, whose life centres on her family, is emotionally isolated in marriage to a partner who patronizingly dismisses the feminine culture of "apron-string[s]." Although she finds congenial friendship with Peter Ketley, who appears out of nowhere and (true to the conventions of the romantic novel) falls in love with her, she is bitterly alone. ". . . we humans, who come into the world alone, and go out of it alone, are always hungering for companionship which we can't quite find," she says. " Our souls are islands, with a coral-reef of reserve built up about them" (Prairie Child 119). Chaddie's loneliness may be part of the human condition, but it is exacerbated by the individualistic, success-oriented culture of her society. "It is not the land, / but man and his greed / that spell the end of things," as Lorna Crozier says in her poem "Time to Praise" (Part 8). There is no place for nurturing love in a world where relationships are sacrificed for political expediency, no room for healing community in the "dog-eat-dog" world of industrial capitalism. Trapped within the constraints of patriarchy, Chaddie has "let existence narrow down to just one thing, to her family" (Prairie Child 204); this social isolation constitutes her personal tragedy.

The isolation engendered by Western man's competition for economic supremacy is not something endemic to either human beings or wild Nature. Interdependence among individuals and species, as Mary Clark notes, characterizes the life of ecosytems. There are symbiotic relationships in which a particular species depends upon another, specific species for its existence, and there are relationships in which two or more species interact because of their reciprocal roles:

> This view sees ecosytems as **non-random** assemblages of interacting species performing multiple essential functions. **No species exists in isolation**: each organism is both the **supporter of** some species and is **supported by** others.

(Clark 123)

The mice which eat grass seeds are devoured by hawks which eventually die and feed the soil micro-organisms which support the life of prairie grasses. These interdependent biota form natural communities of interacting life forms. They had their counterpart, in human society, in the close-knit tribal bands in which modern **Homo sapiens** lived for at least 90% of its existence (Clark 81). These ancient social structures, however, were gradually replaced by the socially-isolated nuclear family units characteristic of industrial civilization. By the early twentieth century they had virtually disappeared from Western society. Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, like Stringer's prairie trilogy, explores some of the social and ecological ramifications of this breakdown in human community and connects its most flagrant abuses to patriarchal man's obsessive need to control woman and the land.

On first reading, Wild Geese (1925) appears to reflect the Western settler's disillusionment with the once-romantic prairie landscape. The Edenic country of homesteadying idylls is replaced by an ungenerous, forbidding land in which grim-faced women and men toil endlessly for a meagre livelihood. Because Ostenso associates her villain with the land, and because her female protagonist leaves the farm for a happier life in the city, the reader can easily conclude that Wild Geese represents a radical departure from the earlier utopian tradition in prairie fiction. Underlying the harsh realism of Ostenso's depiction of agrarian life in northern Manitoba, however, is perverted patriarchal power. The oppressive force in the Gare household is not the tyranny of Nature, but the tyranny of the man who attempts to master woman and the land[3].

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[3]That woman is equally capable of oppressive cruelty is evident in Ostenso's The Young May Moon (1929), a novel set in small-town Manitoba. Marcia Gunther struggles for

Wild Geese grew out of Ostenso's youthful experience as teacher in a one-room school in the farming community of Hayland near the Narrows of Lake Manitoba (Atherton 58). Winner of the first prize of $13,500 in a literary competition sponsored by The Pictorial Review, the Famous Player-Lasky Corporation and Dodd, Mead & Company for the best first novel by a North American writer, it gained critical acclaim within Canada for its unusual realism (Maclellan 20-3). Ostenso's novel tells the story of the Gare family, isolated from its northern Manitoba farm community by Caleb's lust for power. Caleb knows that his wife Amelia has remained emotionally faithful to her dead lover; unable to gain possession of her heart, he uses blackmail--the threat to disclose the secret of her illigitimate son--to exact unconditional obedience from her and their adult children. Martin and Ellen submit passively to Caleb's control, and dumbly work like beasts of burden on their father's land. Judith, however, rebels and flees the farm with her lover. Caleb dies in an unsuccessful effort to save his flax from fire, and the novel ends on a positive note--the tyrant is dead, and Judith experiences happiness and new life in the city. In its movement away from the land the plot seems to associate rebirth and redemption with urban life; Ostenso, however, "does not seem to realize why the settlers are alienated from the soil" (Harrison, Unnamed Country 109). Although she associates Caleb's tyranny with the land, and Judith's opposition to him with the city, Wild Geese is not a study of harsh Nature but of human cruelty and oppression.

The narrator's description of Caleb identifies him closely with a dark, forbidding landscape. He is "a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence" (33). He is "like a thing that belong[s]

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independence from a domineering mother-in-law whose desire for power rivals that of Caleb Gare. Patriarchal power, or power over others, is not the exclusive preserve of men.

infinitely to the earth" (126), a man who views the rich growth of his soil as "the only thing on the earth worthy of respect, of homage" (127). Judith, on the other hand, "hated the soil" (21); she "hated the things that were God to him--the crops, the raising of animals, the rough produce of the land" (174). When she becomes pregnant with her lover's child she hugs her secret to herself: "They would denounce her for the thing she regarded with pride. . . . They were muddled, confused souls, not daring to live honestly. Living only for the earth, and the product of the soil, they were meagre and warped" (224). Judith is the only member of the Gare family who is passionately alive--and she rejects the tyranny of the land for the freedom of the city.

Ostenso certainly attributes some of the darkness in her characters' lives to the starkness of the northern landscape. The urban outsiders--Lind Archer, the young schoolteacher who boards with the Gares, and Mark Jordan, Amelia's illegitimate son--serve as spokespersons for the author when they note "the strange unity between the nature of man and earth here in the north, and of the spareness of both physical and spiritual life" (77). The austerity of the land, Mark notes, is reflected in the lives of the people; it saps them of all feeling and leaves them emotionally withered:

> "We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment. Life here . . . [is] . . . a reflection from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown inward upon themselves, their passions stored up, they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression--no releasing gesture."
>
> "Yes, I think perhaps human life, or at least human contact, is just as barren here as farther north," Lind remarked. "The struggle against conditions must

have the same effect as passivity would have, ultimately. . . . There's no feeling left after the soil and the livestock have taken their share." (78)

Lind is wrong, of course, in her belief that the land has robbed its inhabitants of all feeling. Although only Judith is vibrantly alive, the others hide deep grief and unspoken dreams beneath their masks of reserve and silence. Ostenso, however, portrays their life as an endless, numbing struggle against the forces of a hostile environment. In the spring Judith drives the seeder "like a great dumb shuttle" back and forth across the rough land, and Martin in an adjacent field works "with the bowed, unquestioning resignation of an old unfruitful man" (33). Summer means the "deadening work" (142) of making hay, autumn the endless toil of harvest, and winter the drudgery of "stumbling about in the bleak, icy dawn and tugging at stubborn calves and hauling icicle-rimmed buckets full of water through manure and frozen mud" (90). The work which provides an exhilarating challenge to Bindloss's homesteaders and a source of satisfaction to Stead's Gander Stake becomes, in Wild Geese, an oppressive burden that stifles the human spirit.

Ostenso's identification of Judith with Nature, however, indicates an unintentional ambivalence in her conception of the relationship between humans and the land. Judith seems "the embryonic ecstasy of all life" (33). She is like a "'wild horse'" (65), like a "splendid she-animal, nearly grown" (158), like some "dark young goddess" (73) from the distant, primitive past. Strong, passionate, unruly, pregnant with the new life within her, she symbolizes woman's mystical bond to the earth. Her sensual enjoyment of its embrace when, on a warm day in spring, she takes off her clothing and lies naked on the damp ground, suggests the intimacy of the connection: "Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and mind hidden here in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no

tenderness, she knew. But here was something forbiddingly beautiful, secret as one's own body" (53). Judith's hatred is not of the earth, but of the man whose twisted relationship to the land and its people poisons her connection to it. The spirit that is deadened by mindless labour in her father's fields wakens to ecstasy under the provocation of its seductive charm. Waiting for her lover in the woods one day, she again presses her body against the earth and again experiences its healing presence:

> The light from the setting sun seemed to run down the smooth white bark of the birches like gilt. There was no movement, except the narrow trickle of the water from the spring, and the occasional flare of a bird above the brown depth of the pool. There was no sound save the tuning of the frogs in the marsh that seemed far away, and the infrequent call of a catbird on the wing. Here was clarity undreamed of, such clarity as the soul should have, in desire and fulfilment. Judith held her breasts in ecstasy. (149)

This is not the response to Nature of a woman who hates the soil. Judith feels a "passionate kinship" (Atherton 59) which makes her soul blossom under the influence of earth's beauty and tranquility. Some primeval "female understanding of the earth and its mysteries" (Harding 281) infuses her mind with clarity; holding her breasts in an ecstasy of desire and fulfilment, she is one with the land that she professes to disdain.

Ostenso's ambivalence in her statement of the relationship between humans and the land stems, as Harrison points out, from two different meanings of the term "land." Judith can be identified with the land as natural environment, whereas Caleb can be identified with it "only in the sense that 'land' is a human construct, property, a means to power" (Unnamed Country 111). In opposition to Judith's perception of the earth as a source of inner strength,

her father views the land as a challenge to man's power over Nature.

Caleb's domination of the land has its parallel in his domination of woman. He can continue to expand his livestock herds and his seeded acreage because he holds "the whip hand" (19) over Amelia, because he uses blackmail to enslave her and the children, because his family dare not rebel against his "insanity for power" (160). His obsessive need to control the land makes him see his flax as a "challenge to a man's will" (216); hungry for power, he must "force from the land all that it would withhold" (172) because he sees its yield as a measure of his own prowess. This preoccupation with domination and power absorbs Caleb's emotional energy and removes him from the human sphere of wife and family:

> While he was raptly considering the tender field of flax--now in blue flower --Amelia did not exist to him. There was a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. It was more exacting, even, than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him, but the evil, and the indifference.
>
> Caleb would stand for long moments outside the fence beside the flax. Then he would turn quickly to see that no one was looking. He would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress--more intimate than any he had ever given to woman. (119)

Unable to honour his own spiritual connection to the earth and to the people with whom he dwells, Caleb substitutes a false intimacy with the land. His preoccupation with the flax and his sexual response to it suggests that it has replaced woman as an object of desire; Caleb's

lust for power, however, renders him emotionally impotent. Woman and the land represent an untamed, irrational life force that threatens his "arrogant conscious will" and that must be mastered "even at the cost of losing touch with all nature including his own" (Harrison, Unnamed Country 113). Only half conscious of the hurt and anger that underlies his insane need for power, Caleb bullies his wife and children and attempts to force wealth from the soil. His solitary death in the muskeg is a form of poetic justice for a man guilty of crimes against humans and the earth.

Caleb's death symbolically punishes both these crimes. Shortly before he drowns he learns that his power over his family is gone. Judith has escaped from the farm with her lover, and his wife for the first time has defied his command. The tyrant suddenly realizes that he is a broken man: "Something crumbled within him, like an old wall, leaving bare his spirit. . . . Shame and self-loathing broke upon him overpoweringly" (233). Then he sees the fire that threatens his field of flax. His neighbour has been burning willows on swamp land that Caleb has blackmailed him into buying; sparks jump from the dampened fire onto Caleb's timber land and ignite the flames that spread toward his crop. In a desperate attempt to save the flax Caleb takes a short-cut across the muskeg, and is sucked into its murky depths. An irresistable, "insidious force in the earth" (236) overcomes his efforts to free himself and draws him in deeper and deeper, holding him tightly in its "over-strong embrace" (237). Caleb dies alone, a broken man abandoned by the community he has betrayed and by the earth he has tried to control.

The thematic significance of Wild Geese lies not in its depiction of a sparse country peopled by women and men whose parched spirits reflect the land's aridity, but in its treatment of humankind's quest for healing community. The wild geese whose migratory

flights signal the arrival of spring and fall--"the beginning and the end of the period of growth" (239)--symbolize the loneliness of the solitary human spirit. In spring the birds fly north "to a region beyond human warmth . . . beyond even human isolation . . ." (32; ellipses in text). In autumn they return south, "a remote, trailing shadow . . . a magnificent seeking through solitude . . . an endless quest . . ." (239; ellipses in text). In their symbolic quest for warmth and nurturance they mirror the human inhabitants who are isolated from each other by walls of loneliness:

> The teacher was lonely, and even more conscious of the stark loneliness of Amelia, of Judith, of Ellen and Martin, each within himself. Work did not destroy the loneliness; work was only a fog in which they moved so that they might not see the loneliness of each other. (33)

Ostenso suggests that the land breeds a people whose capacity for intimacy and joy has been sapped by its harshness: not until they move to the city are her protagonists--Judith and Lind and Mark--liberated from their oppressive isolation. Her solution to their spiritual dilemma is wrong, however, because it reflects the imported values of an urban society. As Harrison notes, the author "brings the light of culture to bear upon this primitive, inarticulate community, but because it is an inappropriate culture, it leads her to identify the villain Caleb with the land" (113). Judith's rejection of her father causes her to reject the land even though she is bound to it by every instinct of her body; it is impossible to imagine this magnificent Amazon hosting tea parties in the city! Although Ostenso herself chose to leave the north for a glittering, sophisticated life in American urban centres, her rural heroine has no place in such a cosmopolitan culture. Judith's abandonment of the farm represents Ostenso's failure

to understand fully the implications of her protagonists' quest for community[4].

Critics of industrialized food production have finally recognized the importance of this healing quest to the long-term survival of Western agriculture. Sustainable farming and sustainable community both require a sense of connection to the land and a recognition of the interdependence that characterizes human societies and natural ecosystems. The "feminine" qualities necessary for the development of community, therefore, are equally essential for the development of prairie agriculture. Advocates of sustainability insist that farmers must be nurturers not only of the land but also of its inhabitants. Wendell Berry emphasizes the importance of a compassionate regard for the enduring health of "land, household, community, place" (The Unsettling of America 8). Soule and Piper point out that sustainable farming requires its practioners to play a subjective, nurturing role incompatible with the objective detachment of patriarchal agriculture: "As men no longer saw themselves as keepers of the garden, as nurturers of nature, but as lords over, as exploiters of nature, nurturing came to be labeled a feminine trait, with no place in objective, masculine science" (75). They insist on the importance of interconnections, mutual dependence and responsibility to Nature. Stuart Hill makes a connection between the ecological health of agricultural systems and the psychological health of rural people, and says that the healing of

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[4]Ostenso's description of the spring day on which Lind visits the courteous Bjarnasson family suggests that she recognized the symbolic connection between man's treatment of woman and Nature:

> The air was soft and vibrant with the whir of migratory wild fowl. Rain pools filled the ditches along the road, and lay like stained glass in the low sun; the overhanging willows were in full leaf now, the sedges vividly green and as yet unbowed by a single wind. Such a new, ecstatic world of growth! (43-4)

The sparse, grim bushland of Caleb's farm becomes a place of generous beauty when it is associated with good-hearted men who love their women.

past hurts "is a necessary prerequisite to the achievement of genuine sustainability, both in agriculture and in all other human endeavours" (205). These spokespersons for sustainable agriculture insist that human community is an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. The prairie homesteading novel, however, usually reflects the social isolation that characterized pioneer life. Nellie McClung was one of the few writers whose work contained an alternative vision[5].

McClung's contribution to the ecofeminist ideal of a socially and ecologically sustainable society lies in her emphasis on a neighbourliness which would erode isolation. Her novels and short stories portray women who help new settlers adapt to the unfamiliar conditions of homestead life and who generally devote themselves to improving the quality of pioneer communities. These fictional heroines are neither armchair theorists nor privileged members of the upper class, but teachers and writers and farm homemakers actively engaged in the construction of a society based upon justice, temperance and compassion. Although these women share Western man's dream of dominion over the earth, their anthropocentric visions are modulated by the "feminine" instinct for human-scale development and by an aversion to greed and godless materialism. The women in McClung's fiction are not prototypes for an ecologically sustainable society, but are wives and mothers whose worldly ambition is tempered by Christian virtue and their commitment to human community.

Pearl Watson, heroine of the trilogy Sowing Seeds in Danny (1908), The Second

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[5]Robert Stead's Dennison Grant (1920) and Neighbours (1922) are also exceptions. The former contains a utopian scheme for community development and the latter contains an appealing picture of ethnically-mixed community life.

Chance (1910) and Purple Springs (1921), acts as a spokesperson for the author when she tells a gathering at her old school that women have an important part to play in building the new West. She attributes the many "sore spots" in the world to woman's traditionally limited role, and says that in order to "keep their houses clean," women must "clean up the streets" (103) by participating in the public world outside their homes. Only by taking part in the construction of their nation and by creating strong, healthy communities can they provide secure, nurturing environments for their families. Although Pearl does not exclude men from the work that needs to be done, her description of nation-building emphasises the domestic and community-building roles that require the "feminine" gifts of connectedness and compassion:

> ". . . Canada is like a great big, beautiful house that has been given to us to finish. It is just far enough on so that you can see how fine it is going to be--but the windows are not in--the doors are not hung--the cornices are not put on. It needs polishing, scraping, finishing. That is our work. Every tree we plant, every flower we grow, every clean field we cultivate, every good cow or hog we raise, we are helping to finish and furnish the house and make it fit to live in. Every kind word we say or even think, every gracious deed . . . helps to add those little touches which distinguish a house from a barn." (Purple Springs 103-4)

Pearl's use of the house as a simile for Canada suggests the importance of the work that women usually perform within the home--the nurturing of friends and family, the provision of love and emotional comfort, the cooking and cleaning and other services that constitute household maintenance. Although she also mentions the importance of cultivating fields and

raising livestock, she does not privilege these economic activities above domestic work. Nor does she privilege them above the community-building work of welcoming strangers into their midst. Pearl tells her audience that there are many homesick foreign people in Canada and that "the man or woman who by their kindness, their hospitality, their fair dealing, honesty, neighborliness, makes one of the least of these think well of Canada, is a Master Builder in this Empire" (104). McClung's fiction assigns no less importance to this neighbourly role than to the homesteader's work of providing food to a hungry world.

In her dedication to The Black Creek Stopping-House and Other Stories (1912), McClung acknowledges the work of women whose tireless service helped to build communities in the West. She pays tribute to these pioneers who "fed the hungry, advised the erring, nursed the sick, cheered the dying, comforted the sorrowing, and performed the last sad rites for the dead . . . who kept alive the conscience of the neighbourhood, and preserved for us the best traditions of the race. . . ." Maggie Corbett, operator of the Black Creek Stopping-House, is one such women. The kind-hearted landlady provides room and board and good company for her lodgers, and sets the moral tone for the entire neighbourhood:

> The Black Creek Stopping-House gave not only food and shelter to the men who teamed the wheat to market--it gave them good fellowship and companionship. In the absence of newspapers it kept its guests abreast with the times; events great and small were discussed there with impartial deliberation, and often with surprising results. Actions and events which seemed quite harmless, and even heroic, when discussed along the trail, often changed their complexion entirely when Mrs. Maggie Corbett let in the clear

> light of conscience on them, for even on the very edge of civilization there are still to be found finger-posts on the way to right living.
>
> Mrs. Maggie Corbett was a finger-post, and more, for a finger-post merely points the way with its wooden finger, and then, figuratively, retires from the scene to let you think it over; but Maggie Corbett continued to take an interest in the case until it was decided to her entire satisfaction. (16-17)

By creating a community gathering place and showing concern for her neighbours, Maggie helps to dispell the loneliness and sense of isolation that afflicted prairie women. Her opposition to playing cards and to working on the Sabbath may appear unwarranted to readers schooled in religious liberalism, but this curtailment of her neighbours' freedom is balanced by her compassionate regard for their physical and social well-being. Maggie bakes bread for local bachelors, bandages cut fingers, helps a young woman settle in her new home, provides her with companionship and "sympathetic understanding" (35), foils the attempts of a villain to seduce her and reunites the woman with her estranged father. These are not "big" deeds, but their implications are profound. As I point out in my discussion of Wild Geese and Stringer's prairie trilogy, it is not the harshness of Nature that destroys people in settlement fiction, but human cruelty and indifference. Maggie's warmth and compassion triumphs over apathy and evil and makes Black Creek Stopping-House a powerful symbol of nurturing community[6].

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[6]One could argue, as Susan Wood does, that McClung's "angels on the hearth" are undesirable role models who "successfully 'do everything,'-- managing careers, overthrowing the government, reforming the community, and keeping their families happy . . ." (354). My point is not that women should bear the entire burden of creating community, but that this role is a necessary, and undervalued, one. Woman's traditional work "weave[s] the substance of community ties" (Adair and Howell, "Women Weave Community" 39) and needs to be

McClung's insistence on the "superiority of spiritual resources over material ones" (Jackel 165) colours not only her vision of domestic life but also her picture of agriculture on the prairies. Unlike Harold Bindloss and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, whose prosperous heroes farm vast tracts of land, McClung portrays wealth as a "painted fire" that casts a "false light" (Painted Fires 311)[7]. Her wealthy Motherwells in Sowing Seeds are mean-spirited, ungenerous people who lead barren lives: "Their souls were of a dull drab dryness, in which no flower took root, there was no gold to them but the gold of greed and gain . . ." (128). Her exemplary farmers, on the other hand, are people like Mr. and Mrs. Watson, a poor working man and his wife who buy a run-down farm in order to provide a decent life for their family. Pearl, the oldest child, wants to call it "The Second Chance":

> "Here it is as good a farm as any around here, and it's all run to weeds. I am sure this yard is knee-high with ragweed and lamb's quarter in the summer, and the fields are all grown up with mustard and wild-oats, and they're an abomination to any farm; and so it has just sort of give up and got discouraged, and now it lets in any old weed that comes along, because it thinks it'll never be any good. But here comes the Watsons, the whole bilin' of them, and I can see over there . . . the place the garden will be, all nicely fenced to keep out the cattle; and over there, under the trees, will be the chicken-house, with big white hens swaggerin' in and out of it and down the ravine there will be the pig-pasture, and forninst us will be acres and acres of

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validated in order for humans to live in harmony with each other and with the earth.

[7]Although Helmi and Jack in Painted Fires obtain wealth from their coal mine, they use its profits to provide a church and recreation facilities for the mining community.

> wheat, and behind the bluff there will be the oat-field." (The Second Chance 76)

Pearl imagines a symbiotic relationship in which the Watsons tend the neglected farm and receive in exchange a home with room for a garden, pigs, chickens, cattle, trees and fields of wheat and oats. The family will give the farm a "second chance" and it, in turn, will give them a chance to escape from poverty. Pearl's personification of the farm may be sentimental and child-like and her priority, not unnaturally, be benefits to the people rather than to the land. There is, however, no greed in Pearl's eyes. She envisions the farm as providing sustenance and comfort, not luxury and wealth. Several years later when she returns, a young woman, to her parents' home, she rejoices in the realization of that dream. Thrushes and meadow-larks are singing in the ravine, wild cherries and plums are forming on the bushes, cattle are grazing on the river banks and a field of grain ripples in the breeze. The farm has fulfilled its promise of abundance:

> Pearl remembered the hopes and visions that had come to her the first day she and her father had come to the farm, and through all its dilapidation and neglect, she had seen that it could be made into a home of comfort and prosperity, and now the dream had come true. The Watson family were thriving; their farm had not failed them; comforts, and even a few luxuries were theirs. . . .
>
> It was not too good to be true, she thought, as she looked at the comfortable home, the new barn and the populous farmyard spread out under the quivering sunshine. (Purple Springs 313)

The narrator's emphasis is upon domestic comfort. Prosperity, for the Watsons, does not

mean a magnificent dwelling or winters in California, but warm clothes and good food and a comfortable home. Unlike the heroes of Harold Bindloss's novels, who equate wealth with power, the Watsons equate prosperity with simple comforts, and "even a few luxuries," for the family. They do not need the external trappings of success because they value the intangible spiritual values--connectedness, caring, generosity and compassion--that are at the heart of healthy community[8].

Because the patriarchal quest for prosperity privileges exploitation and dominance above "feminine" cooperation and interdependence, women and land shared a common vulnerability in prairie homesteading fiction. Marginalized by a culture which elevated pride above compassion, mastery above interconnection, they were subject to the power of ambitious, domineering men. In Arthur Stringer's prairie trilogy, Chaddie McKail and the land are both sacrificed to economic and political expediency when Duncan decides that wealth and power are more important than farm or family. In Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Caleb Gare's wife, children and land are all victims of his obsessive need for control. In Nellie McClung's fiction, however, patriarchal authority is challenged by an alternative "feminine" ideology that makes nurturance the basis for human relationships and sustenance the object of relationships with the land. Underlying the work of all three novelists is recognition of the alienating impact of patriarchy and validation of woman's oppositional quest for healing community.

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[8]Pearl speaks with pride of her mother's "honesty and kindness and patience and hard work" (Purple Springs 150). These qualities rank higher than wealth and power in the Watson's system of values.

Chapter Fourteen

In Search of Community, Part II: Tragic Realism and the Comedy of Survival in Two Novels by Frederick Philip Grove

> All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. . . . The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.
>
> - Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 1949[1]

Frederick Philip Grove's novels introduced a new literary genre to the world of prairie fiction. Although both Robert Stead's Grain (1926) and Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925) flouted some of the conventions of the homesteading romance, Grove was the first prairie novelist to adopt, wholeheartedly, the practices of literary realism. His detailed descriptions of pioneer farming in northern Manitoba's bush country and southern Saskatchewan's semi-arid grasslands portray the harshness of settlement life. The settler's survival is not threatened by prairie fires, plagues of grasshoppers or other natural disasters, however, but by his own inability to nurture sustainable human relationships. The search for a compensating sense of community is the central focus of Grove's first two published novels. Our Daily Bread (1928) portrays John Elliot's unsuccessful quest to see his children settled about him "as the children of the patriarchs of Israel were settled about their fathers" (7), and

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[1]pp. 203-4.

Settlers of the Marsh (1925) portrays Niels Lindstedt's ultimately successful quest for home and family. Both protagonists are lonely men who yearn for love and companionship that will fill the emptiness in their lives. John Elliot's role as tragic hero unwilling to compromise his ideals proves ill-adapted to the task of building community, however, while the comic resolution of Niels Lindstedt's quest suggests that forgiveness and reconciliation can provide an emotional basis for accommodation to our prairie home.

Although his love for wild Nature, his admiration for the self-sufficient man of the soil and his distaste for economic ambition could have inspired a literature that explored the potential for sustainable relationships within the prairie ecosytem, Grove's tragic view of life made him view with ambivalence the ability of women and men to create enduring community. The main drama in his prairie novels, as Dick Harrison observes, is not between humans and Nature, but is "within man, between his conscious will and his own nature" (Unnamed Country 114). Frost, hail, floods and blizzards are not the enemy in Grove's fiction; instead, his protagonists defeat their own ends by their failure both to reconcile conflicting needs and to sustain enduring relationships. The strength and determination which enable Douglas Durkin's heroes to conquer the wilderness are, by themselves, inadequate for the task of developing settled communities. John Elliot and Niels Lindstedt are successful pioneers who carve prosperous farms from the wilderness, but who fail--if only temporarily--in the more difficult work of nurturing the relationships which sustain human societies. As Dave Arnason notes in his unpublished dissertation on the development of prairie realism, there are few descriptions of social life in Grove's fiction (195). Perhaps the author's own sense of isolation made it difficult for him to imagine prairie settlements

peopled with neighbours who worked together for a common goal[2]. Or, perhaps, he was merely responding to the social alienation that he observed in the various Manitoba communities in which he taught school. Whatever the reason, Grove's novels portray the loneliness of prairie settlers separated from their fellows not so much by geographical distance as by the emotional isolation endemic to patriarchal culture.

Grove's love of the Manitoba wilderness and his contempt for economic ambition combined to make him highly critical of pioneering society. The homesteader's quest was to conquer Nature in the pursuit of wealth; Grove saw the task of humankind as concern for "the problem of right living" and for the abstract principles of "goodness, truth [and] beauty" (It Needs to Be Said 161). Not surprisingly, he found himself a stranger to his own time. ". . . I love Nature more than man . . . ." he tells his readers in the preface to Over Prairie Trails (xiii), and he repeats that message over and over again in his autobiography, his essays and his books of prairie sketches. Grove was not a misanthrope, but a sensitive, intelligent man who was distressed by the careless exploitation that characterized Western development. "We are, at present, clearly living on capital," he says in a diary entry for June 3, 1940. "We are using up oil and minerals at an appalling rate. . . . [the energy] stored on earth in by-gone

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[2]By all accounts, Grove was unhappy in his role of prairie schoolteacher. His autobiography In Search of Myself (1946) describes a number of struggles with incompatible colleagues and trustees, and generally expresses the bitterness of a man who feels alone in an uncongenial world. W. B. Holliday, who spent some weeks living with the Groves on the Ontario farm to which they moved in 1931, ascribes this sense of isolation to Grove's intellectual arrogance: "He was kind and magnanimous in his daily relationships, but he was inclined to scoff at the pretentions of little men and at the weaknesses of those in public life. I think that, to him, mankind on the whole made a poor showing; indeed, the life of many men was scarcely justifiable" (55). Frank Birbalsingh suggests that Grove's experience of poverty, illness, bereavement "and what he, at any rate, thought was shameful neglect" (63) further contributed to his dissatisfaction with prairie life.

aeons . . . is limited and will be exhausted sooner or later. . . . But, of course, man is improvident" ("Thoughts and Reflections" 340). These words, as relevant today as they were 54 years ago, do not necessarily make Grove the first prairie bioregionalist of European origin, but they do establish his concern for the short-sightedness of Western civilization. Rejecting economic standards as the means for evaluating the health of a nation, he proposed an alternative measure based on "spiritual" (It Needs to Be Said 159) achievement.

Central to Grove's concept of the spiritual life is his idealized image of the self-sufficient prairie farmer. In an essay in The Turn of the Year, he creates an idyllic picture of the homesteaders with whom he boards while teaching school in a remote northern district one summer. Grove's portrait emphasizes the spiritual contentment of this man who pursues the goal of independence rather than material wealth:

> He had only three acres broken which he planted to oats or barley; but that did not include his garden. Besides, he had six head of cattle, four horses--two for work and two for driving-- a few pigs, and a flock of chickens. That kept him and his family in ample comfort. He cut wild hay, of course; and in winter he garnered a harvest of ice from the Lake, enough to provide him with water all through the summer. . . . What little cash he needed, he got by selling butter and eggs in summer, and in winter by selling a few catches of whitefish from the Lake. Unlike those who had set their heart on a money-crop of wheat-- and there were of them even in this aboriginal wilderness--he did not have a laborious life. So-called civilization, with its feverish chase after treasure, seemed infinitely far away. If this was primitive, it seemed refreshingly dignified to me. The man was neither dependent nor helpless: he

never worried; Nature and God were his only two concerns[3]. (140)

Since Grove was both an impractical intellectual and a man afflicted by frequent bouts of ill health, there is something almost pathetic in his idealization of the vigorous, primitive homestead life. Certainly he knew enough about the prairie climate to realize that his romantic picture could be shattered by such natural disasters as prolonged drought and severe hailstorms--both of which he describes in his essay. He also had enough experience both as a farmhand and as an economically unsuccessful farmer to know that the agricultural life was not always idyllic. Yet this utopian vision of the self-sufficient, independent husbandman who owes allegiance only to Nature and to God pervades Grove's writing. In another essay, "Harvest," he describes with both envy and admiration the strong-sinewed workman who is "the incarnation of all that is fine and noble in bodily labour" (The Turn of the Year 210). The harvester symbolizes, for him, humanity's age-old spiritual bond to the earth, its connection to the "great, primeval mysteries" (211) which have existed since the beginning of time. His intimate contact with the land ennobles him, lends him a moral seriousness "far

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[3]This romantic portrait of homestead life bears a remarkable resemblance to more recent descriptions of appropriate-scale agriculture. Gene Logsdon, an articulate spokesperson for ecological agriculture in the United States, writes enthusiastically about his visit to a smallholding similar to the one on which Grove spent his summer:

> I once asked an Amish farmer who had only twenty-six acres why he didn't acquire a bit more land. He looked around at his ten fine cows, his sons hoeing the corn with him, his spring water running continuously by gravity through house and barn, his few fat hogs, his sturdy buildings, his good wife heaping the table with food, his fine flock of hens, his plot of tobacco and acre of strawberries, his handmade hickory chairs (which he sold for all the extra cash he really needed), and he said: "Well, I'm just not smart enough to farm any more than this **well**." I have a hunch no one could. (9-10)

Logsdon is not describing a prairie farm, which requires more acres in order to compensate for comparatively low productivity, but his vision of small-scale, diversified agriculture echoes Grove's image of the self-sufficient prairie homestead.

beyond that of a mere thinker or scientist" (211) and leads him to a mystical union with the natural world. Whether or not Grove's love for Nature and respect for traditional rural life led him to idealize unrealistically the yeoman of the soil, the homesteaders in The Turn of the Year provide ecologically sensitive models of agricultural husbandry. Why, then, was Grove's vision of man's relationship to his prairie environment generally a tragic one? Why are protagonists like John Elliot unable to create enduring bonds to the land? The answer, I believe, lies in the author's view of literary realism.

Grove believed that the central tragedy of greatness was the failure of noble-minded men and women to realize their ideals. In his often-quoted definition of "tragic" he says that unrealized aspiration is an inevitable part of genuine greatness: "To have greatly tried and to have failed; to have greatly wished and to be denied; to have greatly longed for purity and to be sullied; to have greatly craved for life and to receive death: all that is the common lot of greatness upon earth." The tragic hero does not dumbly endure his fate, however, but exalts in a brave acceptance of human limitation. "In this acceptance or acquiescence," Grove says, "lies true tragic greatness: it mirrors the indomitable spirit of mankind" (It Needs to Be Said 87). This literary premise underscores his fiction and helps to justify a life which he regarded as a failure[4]. Since he defined literary realism as "the endeavour to reproduce nature or to describe real life just as it appears to the artist" (It Needs to Be Said 59), his tragic vision resulted in work that portrays noble men and women who strive to realize

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[4]In his autobiography he says that he has striven after the unattainable, and that "only the striving after the unattainable [is] in any sense worth while and worthy of human endeavour" (In Search of Myself 230). Much of Grove's enormous output of writing remains unpublished; his published work received only modest praise, and even less financial reward, during his lifetime. Not surprisingly, then, his role in his autobiography is that of tragic hero.

dreams that remain unfulfilled. This tragic view of life pervades his prairie fiction.

Grove viewed pioneer man as "a tragic type" (In Search of Myself 225) whose quest to conquer Nature contained within its achievement the seeds of the pioneer's ultimate defeat. Although he knew homesteaders who valued peasant-style self-sufficiency above economic ambition, he rightfully perceived that the pioneer's task of converting wildland to wheatfields destroys the conditions which gave rise to his very existence:

> Its whole endeavour is bent upon reshaping and doing away with the very condition in its environment which gives it its economic and historic justification; and when it has been done away with; when the environment is tamed, the task is done; and the pioneer has used up, in doing it, the span of life allotted to him. He suddenly realizes that he has been working for a purpose which has defeated its end. He cannot, now, settle down to enjoy the fruit of his labour. (225)

The pioneer cannot enjoy his success because the qualities that enabled him to master the wilderness--qualities like physical strength and relentless will--prove maladaptive to the gentler conditions of civilized society. Grove notes that these "masculine" traits are incompatible with tender devotion to the female sex (224), and attributes to their social dominance the inferior position of women. Equally important, however, is their incompatibility with the development of sustainable community.

Underlying John Elliot's personal failure to establish a family dynasty, in Our Daily Bread, is the failure of patriarchal society to nurture sustaining, close-knit relationships. At the beginning of the novel Mrs. Elliot holds the family together; upon her death, however, her children go their separate ways and her husband is left alone to face emotional chaos.

During the next twenty years he watches helplessly as his sons and daughters leave the family farm and become strangers to him. One son is killed in the war and another is committed to an institution for the mentally incompetent; the remaining eight children make disastrous marriages, prove financially irresponsible or abandon the sacred claims of agriculture by moving to the city. Elliot alienates his offspring in a series of futile efforts to regain paternal control; finally, when he can no longer live alone, he is passed from one child to another until he goes home to die, a broken old man whose death will sever the few remaining ties that kept his family together.

Although the setting of the novel might appear to suggest a connection between the emotional barrenness of personal relationships and the physical barrenness of the land, Grove's treatment of patriarchy suggests that human arrogance rather than a harsh landscape is to blame for the destruction of community. When John Elliot as a young man moves West, the "bare, naked . . . sun-baked, rain-washed" hills of southwest Saskatchewan are "devoid of all the comforts of even slightly older civilisations, devoid, at the time, even of the consolation of human neighbourhood" (5). This absence of "human neighbourhood" (along with the absence of such cultural institutions as school and church), not the absence of trees and lush meadows, makes the land inhospitable. Grove's "vision of the human tragedy" (Ricou, Vertical Man/ Horizontal World 63) is not, as Laurence Ricou suggests, the homesteader's inevitable failure in his struggle with a harsh environment, but his failure in the struggle to create enduring community. The shortgrass prairie country, Grove rightly observes in his autobiography, has a tranquil charm of its own, but only those who "have lived intimately with such a landscape" can appreciate its "shy, often desolate beauty" (Search 258). John Elliot's success as a farmer demonstrates his ability to adapt his

expectations to the prairie's modest bounty; his pride and arrogance, however, destroy the delicate web of human relationships which would sustain his family on the land.

Unlike the two-dimensional heroes of earlier prairie fiction, John Elliot is a complex man whose domineering personality is balanced by an admirable sense of loyalty to his home place. Just as real people are neither heroes nor villains, as Grove points out in his essay on realism, so too are literary figures neither one nor the other. Like ourselves, they are "guilty and not guilty at the same time" (It Needs to Be Said 73). Elliot's commitment to his land and his practise of sound husbandry and right livelihood make him an exemplary figure. Sound cultural practises[5] enable him to harvest wheat when the crops of other men have withered from drought and heat. Frugality and careful management enable him to support his large family and to maintain a comfortable margin of cash in the bank when other men are living on borrowed money. Unlike his oldest son, who "look[s] upon farming as more or less a financial game" (108), he sees farming as a spiritual vocation that meets the important needs of humankind. Elliot is proud of belonging "to the hidden groundmass of the race which carried on essential tasks," proud of serving God by growing "his and his children's daily bread" (190). Free of both greed and economic ambition, he exemplifies a prairie farmer's right relationship to the land. The flaw which makes him the tragic hero of Our Daily Bread is his inability to develop a similar relationship with the members of his own family.

Ironically, John Elliot's one great ambition centres on his dream of family life. Far more important than wealth or status, this dream justifies and lends purpose to his existence.

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[5]John Elliot seeds only summerfallow, a practise now linked to soil salinity but then considered an important means of conserving moisture.

In honourably raising ten childen and teaching them to "multiply the seed themselves one day," he is fulfilling his human duty: "To live honourably, to till the land, and to hand on life from generation to generation: that was man's duty; that, to him, in spite of all doubts, had meant and still meant serving God" (189). The tragedy of his life is his failure to achieve this dream. Like the biblical sons in Grove's epigraph to the novel, Elliot's children "walked not in his ways" (I Samuel, 8.3). Even before his wife's death they have begun to free themselves from his rule, to discard his teachings. Some years later, grieved by a visit to his daughter in Winnipeg, he realizes fully that his children have abandoned the ways of their father: ". . . their aims were not what his aims had been. . . . their lives were chaos, and through their lives, his own was chaos" (191). This bitter recognition of failure colours John Elliot's final years and destroys much of the purpose of his existence.

John Elliot's patriarchal control of wife and children alienates him from his family and, ironically, leads to his ultimate loss of power. Even the woman who has obediently borne him twelve children (two of whom die in early childhood) turns from him in the months prior to her death. Mrs. Elliot's refusal to allow her husband to care for her is an act of rebellion against the man who married her with the "single object" of "securing to himself the mother of his children" (6). In the madness that is part of her last days she dresses in her best silk gown, drives to town and attends a dance. Her comment when she returns home is a condemnation of her entire married life: "For once in my life I have had a good time!" (131). Coerced by her husband into following **his** dream, she has devoted her life to raising a large family that she does not want. A conversation that she has with her oldest daughter, recounted by Gladys to two of her sisters eighteen years later, reveals the unexplored depths of her silent despair:

"One day when father had been in the room and she had motioned him away, she turned to me. Gladys, she said, I am a bad woman!

"Mother, I said, how can you say such a thing!

"Oh, she cried, I don't even know any longer whether there's a God or not. If there is, I don't care. Come here, listen. I want to whisper to you. You may think I've had so many children because I was fond of them. No! They just came. Because I lived an evil life with your father. Look at me!--And she suddenly bared her body: a terrible sight!

"Another time she said, Gladys, I am the harlot of Babylon! And she wailed and cried, half, I believe, from pain; half from despair." (132-3)

John Elliot is not a brutal man like Caleb Gare. He does not beat his wife, nor does he deliberately humiliate her. Indeed, as Mrs. Elliot tells her daughter Mary, he is an "upright" (29) man. Elliot's inability to reconcile his moral rectitude with his humanity, however, constitutes the tragedy of the novel (Keith 28). The qualities which have made him a successful homesteader have robbed him of the empathy and gentleness necessary for harmonious relationships. "A pioneering world . . . is a man's world," as Grove says in In Search of Myself. It values primarily the strength which enables man to bear "the brunt of the battle" (224) in the struggle to master Nature. Elliot's strong will and determination make him an exemplary pioneer, but fail to provide the emotional warmth and understanding necessary for sustainable community.

Elliot's blindness towards his family's emotional needs destroys his ability to recognize his wife and children as individuals with lives apart from his own and, ultimately, destroys his power over them. He sees Mrs. Elliot as the mother of his children, his sons and

daughters as perpetrators of his seed who will till the land and "hand on life from generation to generation" (189). He sees himself as the stern, upright patriarch who rules his family with an iron hand and condemns those who stray from the path of righteousness. Elliot's dying wife turns from him, however, and he becomes a "barely tolerated stranger" (126) in his own house. Later, after their mother's death, he becomes (in his son-in-law's words) a "Lear of the prairie" (258) as his children abandon him. He spends his last years wandering from one house to another, seeking a haven of peace and rest that his own intolerance will not let him find[6]. The desolation of these final days is the inevitable outcome of a life ruled by patriarchal values. The novel "reverses the ideal of the pioneer as the conquering hero," as Isobel McKenna notes, and instead expresses sympathy "for those at whose expense so much was accomplished" (111). Inherent in its plot and characterization is a critique of male domination and an unspoken plea for an androgynous social order based on the complementary qualities of "feminine" warmth and "masculine" reason.

Although they are both essential to human survival, Western patriarchal tradition has privileged the cool, detached logic of reason above the heated passion of "bestial" emotion. Emotions, as Mark Clark notes, are treated as "lowly, animal-like, genetically imposed, and generally 'bad,'" while reason, "being the source of the intellect, of rational thought and of freedom of choice" (147) is considered "good." Emotions, however, teach us "to behave in ways appropriate " (Clark 148) to our species and therefore help to ensure our continued existence. Feelings such as love and compassion, for example, motivate us to care for

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[6]Only a few years before his death his oldest daughter tells a younger sister that she is still afraid of him, just as their mother was. "I thought I had grown beyond it," she says. "I am getting old myself. But the moment I saw him I knew if he scolded, I'd tremble" (285). Elliot's loneliness is the price he pays for inspiring such fear.

helpless offspring and to protect each other from danger. When we suppress this instinctive social cohesiveness, we get into trouble. "Most of our current difficulties," Clark says, "can be traced to denial of both our relatedness to Nature and our need for strong social bondedness" (149). By privileging "masculine" reason above "feminine" empathy and warmth, patriarchal values and institutions weaken these social bonds and thus lessen human chances of surivival.

John Elliot's belated recognition of the need for connectedness and compassion marks his transformation from failed patriarch to tragic hero. Earlier he instinctively marries a woman who is his complement, who adds the "touch of human blood-heat" to his "dogmatic forthrightness." He does not, at the time, recognize his lack of warmth as a defect, and is proud of "the preponderance, in him, of brain over impulse" (11). As time goes by, however, he begins to see the strengths of her nature:

> . . . though, in articulate thought, he still defended his own, appraising reason above all else, he was at heart very doubtful about the justice of such a verdict. Many trifles flitted up before his mind, examples of how she had been able to exact obedience from the children, by a word, a look, a smile, when all he could extract from them, by commands which were the result of careful thinking, was an evasion of his orders or a concealment of their wishes and of the actions which conformed to their desires. (11)

John Elliot begins to understand that "masculine" force and reason are not always superior to the gentler "feminine" virtues--a tentative conclusion ratified by the events which follow his wife's death. Life is chaotic and "devoid of meaning" (139) without Mrs. Elliot's nurturing

presence[7]. He realizes that she held the family together and, by the mere fact that she was there, "kept all evil passions under control" (145). When she is gone the children grow away from him and scatter to three provinces; this breaking up of their relationships appears to him as "conditioned by [her death]" (163). Patriarchy, he comes to realize, is not "a complete principle of life" (Stobie 104). John Elliot's final understanding of his own shortcomings and of the limitations of patriarchal power constitutes the cathartic experience that redeems his life and transforms Grove's account of his failure into a celebration of the "indomitable spirit" (Grove, It Needs to Be Said 87) of humankind.

Believing that the acceptance of fate confers "true tragic greatness" (It Needs to Be Said 87), Grove converts his protagonist's suffering and death from pathos to an exaltation of the unconquerable human soul. In the final weeks of his life John Elliot leaves his daugher's house and walks one hundred miles across open country to his farm. Although he dies shortly after his arrival, his bold search for the love and comfort that he once found at home demonstrates his resilience and courage. The narrator's description of the novel's final scene mutes tragedy with a recognition of Elliot's momentary triumph:

> . . . in most of [those children who were assembled] a feeling rose to the surface that with him the last link had been broken which so far had held the many divergent forces at work within the family together. . . . Henceforth, their eyes would be focused on their own, individual futures.
>
> But, once more, all but two of John Elliot's family had been assembled. (390)

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[7]Grove emphasizes this point by entitling Book One "The Passing of Mrs. Elliot" and Book Two "Chaos."

It is a paltry triumph for Elliot, admittedly, this bringing together of his children at his deathbed; the last line, however, suggests that Grove viewed the family gathering as an important symbol of his protagonist's recognition of the need for reconciliation and community. Elliot's "belated understanding" (Spettigue, n.p.) redeems him and enables him to achieve a spiritual victory even at the point of death.

This emphasis on a "metaphysical morality that encourages man to rise above his natural environment and his animal origins" (23), Joseph Meeker says, makes tragedy an inappropriate guide to interpersonal relationships and to relationships with the natural world. Literary tragedy is based upon the premise that although individuals exist in a state of unsuccessful conflict with superior powers (such as Nature or the gods), humankind can emerge spiritually victorious in the face of its own defeat. This belief, according to Meeker, dangerously inflates humanity's already-exaggerated sense of superiority to Nature. ". . . the environmental crisis raises the possibility that the world itself and all its creatures are in jeopardy because humanity has thought too highly of itself," he notes. The "tragic view of man," by exacerbating human arrogance, has led to "cultural and biological disasters" (24) which threaten the survival of our own and other species. Whether or not this view is applicable to other works of literary tragedy is a question beyond the scope of this paper. It is helpful, however, in guiding the reader to an ecocritical understanding of Our Daily Bread. John Elliot's proud authoritarianism alienates him from the children who would care for him in his declining years and leads to his premature death; neither an unquenchable spirit nor a belated recognition of his own arrogance serves to reconcile him to his family community. Rather than ridicule his pretensions or satirize his pride, tragedy ennobles his failure to accommodate himself to the basic conditions of social existence.

Curiously enough, Meeker echoes Grove's contention that the pioneer is a tragic type; unlike Grove, however, he sees no possibility for redemption in heroic failure. Human pioneers, he says, are like weeds and rats and starlings. Members of these colonizing species are tough, aggressive, often ruthless creatures capable of thriving in inhospitable environments. They are bold individuals who make their homes on new frontiers and who risk their lives in the conquest of new territory. The "loners of the natural world," they are the "tragic heroes" (28) who make paths for other species to follow. This pattern--perceived as heroic only when the actors are human--is relatively common in the natural world. One has only to observe the weeds that rapidly cover raw highway enbankments with plant growth in order to realize that pioneering activities are not unique to human beings. Tragedy casts a romantic glow on human behavior that imitates the natural behavior of ecological pioneering species:

> The tragic attitude assumes remarkable behavior to be the result of a remarkable personality and an exclusively human prerogative. But Achilles does no more or less for human posterity than a fireweed growing on a glacial moraine does for the plants that will succeed it.

The self-destructive behavior of human pioneers, however, has no counterpart in Nature. The fireweed "will indeed be succeeded by different kinds of plants until ultimately a complex forest emerges, while Achilles will be reincarnated by imitators from among his own species for many centuries, to the grief of many Troys and many Hectors" (28). Plant and animal pioneers prepare the way for climax ecosystems in which interdependent life forms exist in stable communities; human pioneers, on the other hand, strive for supremacy in an unsustainable, pyramid-shaped hierarchy of power. This quest for dominance gives

pioneer society its tragic character. Western civilization, spread throughout the world by heroic individuals who "break new ground and surmount huge obstacles," (Meeker 30), has developed as a tragedy in which humankind overcomes barriers to achievement only to find itself presiding over its own destruction. Although the consequences of human arrogance are only now becoming apparent, natural laws[8] dictate that a price must soon be paid for discounting the inherent limitations of ecological systems. The pioneer's historic victory over Nature can only be short-lived, for the tragic vision which inflates him with a sense of his own dignity must ultimately condemn him to failure. Tragedy enables him to endure with courage and fortitude the catastrophe that he has brought on himself[9].

Comedy, on the other hand, mocks the tragic, human pretension to greatness and insists on accommodation to the demands of an imperfect world. In its emphasis on the reconciliation of conflicting needs it provides, as Hayden White points out, a picture of healing relationships which create harmony from chaos:

> The reconciliations which occur at the end of Comedy are reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements in the world; these

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[8]The First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics, for example, point out the absurdity of human expectations based on an infinitely-expanding energy supply (Clark 36-8). Depleted reserves of fossil fuels (rather than prudence or moral virtue) will soon oblige humans to adopt renewable energy technologies and to recognize the limited carrying-capacity of global ecosystems.

[9]The farmers in such Sinclair Ross stories as "A Field of Wheat" and "The Lamp at Noon" provide particularly good example of men who face with heroic stoicism the fruits of human arrogance.

> elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others. (Metahistory 9)

Unlike tragedy, which suggests that it is noble to die for one's cause, comedy advocates compromise. Its protagonists abandon the "high moral ideals and glorified heroic poses" of tragedy in favour of more "commonplace" (Meeker 24) positions which lead towards co-operation and sustainable existence. Comedy recognizes that humans behave foolishly and irrationally, but celebrates their capacity to survive in spite of whatever reasons there may be for metaphysical despair. In its emphasis upon the continuity of life and biological wellbeing, it echoes the life-affirming structure of evolution itself: "Productive and stable ecosystems are those which minimize destructive aggression, encourage maximum diversity, and seek to establish equilibrium among their participants--which is essentially what happens in literary comedy" (Meeker 27). Comic resolutions depict stable communities in which humans harmoniously co-exist with each other and with non-human Nature. As such, they point to the importance of community in any scheme for sustainable ecosystems.

Ecological communities of interdependent life forms provide useful models for human community. The pervasiveness of symbiosis in the natural world suggests, as Kirkpatrick Sale points out, that Nature favours mutual dependence as the means of survival: ". . . species survive not because of any particular attribute of one of its 'fittest' individuals, but because the population **as a whole** has evolved a mutual relationship with another species" (113). These symbiotic relationships are the key to successful human societies. Not only must humans co-operate with the other species that share their terrestrial home; they must also co-operate with each other. They must develop the "complex webs of inter-relationships" (Forsey 2) that characterize natural ecosystems. The pattern of

accommodation inherent in literary comedy suggests that these mutually-beneficial relationships hinge on compromise and the willingness to relinquish abstract ideals for the prosaic reality of human survival.

Although Frederick Philip Grove's first published novel contains many elements of tragedy, Niels's and Ellen's reconciliation at the end of Settlers of the Marsh provides a comic resolution that points to accommodation as a guiding principle for sustainable community. The protagonist's quest for the warmth and companionship of wife and family is initially thwarted by Ellen's refusal to marry him and, subsequently, by his disastrous marriage to Clara Vogel. Driven almost mad by loneliness and by the knowledge that he married the district whore, Niels kills his wife and goes to prison for manslaughter. If Settlers of the Marsh had been a tragedy, this event would have concluded the story of a man whose poor judgement and lack of compassion doomed to failure his noble aspirations. The novel, however, is a comedy in its ultimate emphasis upon the resolution of conflict. Niels pays his penalty to society and is absolved of sin. His return to the farm is marked by forgiveness, reconciliation and the promise of unity contained in his and Ellen's decision to marry.

The novel's opening scene emphasizes not so much the harshness of Nature as the emotional isolation of pioneer society. Niels Lindstedt, recent immigrant from Sweden, accompanies a friend to the Amundsen homestead where they are to dig a well. The time is early November, and the two men become lost in a blizzard. The old homesteader on whose shack they stumble refuses them shelter, and when they finally arrive at the Amundsens' they are met by a man whose cold self-sufficiency is "repulsive" to Niels and by a young woman who is "utterly impersonal" (24) in her detachment from them. The sense of loneliness that

pervades these scenes haunts Niels throughout most of the novel. Although he soon comes to love the "quick pulse of the seasons" and the "virile and fertile growth" (55) of the northern Manitoba bush country[10], the land cannot satisfy his need for human companionship. During long days and nights alone in the bush, he is conscious of his "utter isolation" (45) and yearns for the warmth of a woman's love.

Niels recognizes that material success is not enough to make him happy, and that the "accessories of life" are the essential things that make living worthwhile. A family would firmly establish him in his new country, would strengthen his existing bond to the land:

> He himself might be forever a stranger in this country; so far he saw it against the background of Sweden. But if he had children, they would be rooted here. . . . He might become rooted himself, through them. . . .
>
> The picture which he saw, of himself and a woman in a cozy room, with the homely light of a lamp shed over their shoulders, while the winter winds stalked and howled outside and while from above the pitter-patter of children's feet sounded down, took more and more definite form. . . . (45; ellipses in text)

Although initially she is nameless, the woman in this recurring vision soon takes the form of Ellen Amundsen. She and their children, Niels believes, would make him part of the bushland community where he lives. They would connect him to both people and geographical place. After his friend Nelson marries he feels alone, in need "of the company of one whom he could trust, on whom he could rely, who would understand the turmoil in his

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[10]In Over Prairie Trails, Grove describes this "backwoods bushland" as "second only to Paradise" (15).

heart without an explanation in so many words" (54). In the absence of a wife, he longs to be with his mother, to "feel her gnarled, calloused fingers rumpling his hair, and to hear her crooning voice droning some old tune" (55-6). These wistful dreams of a woman's love reflect Niels's need for "feminine" community. Increasing prosperity cannot begin to compensate for the emotional void that work, alone, leaves in his life.

Niels's isolation is not the result of a sparsely populated countryside or geographical distances, but of his own betrayal of human intimacy. A loner by nature, his response to internal conflict is to withdraw from others rather than to seek comfort in companionship. Early in the novel he is torn between his love for Ellen and his sexual desire for the charming Clara Vogel. This moral dilemma turns him in upon himself: "He had become reticent again as he had perforce been during his first year in the new country. He never spoke a word beyond what was exactly needed to convey his meaning . . ." (57; ellipsis in text). Only gradually does he become friends with Ellen, and then he betrays their friendship by turning away from her when she rejects his offer of marriage. Burdened by memories of her father's brutality, Ellen has promised her mother that she will not marry. She tells Niels of her mother's near-slavery and of the self-induced abortions designed to avert her father's wrath at unwanted pregnancies. But the final horror that makes marriage impossible for her, she says, is a memory of her dying mother vainly trying to resist Amundsen's sexual advances. "That night," she tells Niels, "I vowed to myself: No man, whether I liked him or loathed him, was ever to have power over me!" (112). Although she pleads with him to remain friends, Niels walks away from Ellen after she has told him her story. This desertion, as Hallvard Dahlie observes, "dramatizes his inability to make a commitment to her when she most needs it" (54). It marks his betrayal of friendship and love. No wonder that Niels subsequently feels

that life is "useless" and without "justification" (116)! By deciding not to see Ellen again he abandons the emotional connection with others that gives life its most important meaning.

Niels further sins against community when he marries Clara Vogel. Although he does not love the entrancing widow, he feels honour-bound to marry her after he succumbs to her sexual charms. This decision, as Clara later says bitterly, constitutes a betrayal of love:

> "You had not the force to resist when I wanted you . . . and you had to legalise the thing behindhand. That's why you married me. . . . Had I known it then, you would never have snared me. At the time I thought you were really in love with me, you really **wanted** me, you really wanted **me**! Not only a woman, any woman. Do you know what you did when you married me? You prostituted me. . . . When you married me, you committed a crime!" (154)

Clara's share of responsibility for their catastrophic marriage does not absolve Niels of blame. Having used her to satisfy his sexual needs and married her to satisfy his need for honour, he realizes that he does not love this woman whom he has made his wife. Their relationship, without the necessary grounding of mutual commitment, becomes a bitter parody of marriage:

> They lived side by side: without common memories in the past, without common interests in the present, without common aims in the future. . . .
>
> Each was facing eternity alone! . . .
>
> They were strangers; strangers they would remain . . . (137; second and third ellipses in text)

Clara and Niels gradually withdraw further and further from each other. She stops cooking and keeping house for him, and makes unexplained trips to the city. He moves into the hired

man's shack and tries to avoid seeing her when he goes to the house with food and water. To what extent is Niels responsible for this dismal state of affairs? The narrative voice recognizes that homestead life is incompatible with Clara's hedonistic nature, and pities her unhappiness; Niels, with Ellen as his idealized model of womanhood, judges his wife and finds her guilty. In the response by Niels's neighbours, however, they stand jointly condemned. Not one person called on the newly-married couple; neither a congratulation nor "an invitation for neighbourly intercourse" was extended to them. Niels, conscious of this inhospitality, feels "as if he were surrounded by a huge vacuum in which the air was too thin for human relationships to flourish" (129). The cause of this neighbourhood reticence, presumably, is as much embarrassment as disapproval. It is exacerbated by Niels's own unwillingness to make social overtures. The neighbours, it is true, do not call, but "**[nor do] the pair call on any one**" (126; emphasis mine). Soon Niels's only human contact is with Bobby Lund, his hired man. By the time he learns from a neighbour woman that he has married the district whore, he is virtually a hermit and has no friend to turn to in his distress. His murder of Clara is an act of madness that stems not only from his knowledge of sexual betrayal, but also from his loneliness and self-imposed isolation. In the absence of human bonds that could restrain him, Niels takes Clara's life.

This murderous act, which in a tragedy would mark the protagonist's final fall from grace, leads to the forgiveness and reconciliation characteristic of comic resolution. When he awakens from sleep after killing Clara, Niels washes his hands in a symbolic act of cleansing. He then gives all his property to Bobby, who has been like a son to him, and turns himself in to the police. During the six and a half years that he spends in prison, he becomes spiritually reunited with humanity. ". . . even here a human heart beats, human sympathy

plans the welfare of others" (194) the narrator says-- an indication, surely, that compassion and community can be found even in the most inhospitable environments. The warden makes him see that he is "not an outcast, a being despised for what he had done" (195), and that he has "paid the penalty" (201) for his sins. He corresponds for Niels with Bobby, speaks to him of Ellen and offers him forgiveness, understanding and the hope of redemption. By the time that Niels returns to his settlement, he is ready to rejoin society.

The ending of Settlers of the Marsh, in its emphasis on reconciliation and reunion, celebrates the formation of human community and, as Dahlie notes, transforms the novel from "potentially being a tragedy to becoming a form of comedy" (69). On returning to his house Niels is greeted by a cardboard sign reading "Welcome Home" and by rooms swept clean of Clara's possessions and refurnished with his own; suddenly conscious of the meaning of this gesture, he is "overcome with a strange feeling" (199) almost of happiness. He notices, too, that the hired-man's shack is occupied by Bobby's mother, and remembers that Bobby, now married, lives close by. Then Mrs. Lund joins him, and after chores and supper they go together to call on her son:

> An hour or so later they crossed the farm, following a footpath worn into the soil no doubt by Mrs. Lund, by Bobby, his wife and . . . his children. . . . That footpath suggested that there were neighbours, friendly neighbours. There had never been any before. . . . (204; ellipses in text)

Although the population of the settlement has increased during Niels's absence, the perception of "friendly neighbours" is based not so much on awareness of local population increase as on a new sense of belonging. For the first time he experiences the northern marshland community as a genuine home. His new commitment to people is reflected in a

decision to accept the hospitality of Bobby's already-crowded shack rather than return alone to an empty house. It is also reflected in his decision to offer Ellen the friendship of "a brother" (211). Guided by the knowledge that he has done her "a great wrong" (208) by leaving her alone when she needed him, and by the nurturing vision of his mother and an old neighbour "whom he had loved" (210), Niels goes to Ellen. Their reconciliation and decision to marry mark the conclusion to the novel and give to Settlers of the Marsh the happy ending of a literary comedy.

Although critics such as Desmond Pacey have questioned its appropriateness, this resolution is a necessary conclusion to the protagonist's quest for community and a necessary part of the novel's comic design. Pacey argues that the "logical conclusion of the tragic train of events is Niels' murder of his faithless wife," and that Grove is wrong in replacing that ending with "something resembling contentment" (46). A more useful arguement, however, is Ronald Sutherland's contention that the ending illustrates the human adaptability that is part of ordinary life. Niels and Ellen know that they will not achieve perfect happiness, and will adjust their expectations accordingly: "Considerably battered, a little wiser, expecting a lot less from life, they will carry on. Which would seem to be precisely the way life goes--most people, when struck by adversity, do not roll over and die in order to complete the tragic design; they carry on, letting time heal as best it can" (50). Accommodation to biological reality constitutes the wisdom that Niels and Ellen learn from twelve years of misery. Although the springtime setting of the final scene evokes images of youthful infatuation, Grove's use of the "nature myth" of death and resurrection (which, as Margaret Stobie notes, is "the fundamental movement of comedy" [82]) suggests the maturity of deliberate judgement. Separation has "opened their eyes" to their need for each other;

suffering has made them "sweet" (216) and age has mellowed the intolerance of their youthful idealism: "They are older. Both feel it. Older than they were when they threaded these thickets before. They are quieter, less apt to rush at conclusions, to close in a struggle with life . . ." (216; ellipsis in text). This acceptance of reality is not the heady, passionate stuff of romance, but the accommodation and reconciliation of comedy.

Realism in Grove's first two prairie novels reflects the mixture of comic and tragic elements that constitutes human life. The happy ending of comedy requires protagonists to accommodate the conflicting demands of people (self and others) and place, while the noble failure (in love, in war, in domestic fortune) that characterizes tragedy leaves the hero spiritually unbroken but utterly alone. Comedy thus proves better adapted than tragedy as a form in which to cast the quest for healing community. Grove's novels confirm this thesis. The comic resolution that infuses Settlers of the Marsh with the possibility of forgiveness and new life is replaced in Our Daily Bread by the grim, fatalistic spirit of tragedy. John Elliot is a tragic hero in his unrealized quest to establish a family dynasty of self-sufficient farmers. Although he wants to see his sons and daughters settled around him, his pride and intolerance alienate his children and condemn him to a lonely, and ultimately homeless, old age. Belated recognition of his folly brings wisdom and understanding, but they come too late to prevent the disintegration of his family or the loss of his farm. Niels Lindstedt, on the other hand, becomes part of his community by learning tolerance and compassion. He initially sabotages his vision of domestic happiness by failing to meet Ellen's need for friendship and by marrying Clara Vogel without love for her, but his repentence brings forgiveness and a renewal of life. The comic spirit of reconciliation allows Niels and Ellen to resolve past differences and to come together in a marriage that will unite people and place in a sustainable relationship on the land.

Conclusion: The Critic as Prophet and Revisionary Historian

Can the past already sown
with its seeds, yield a future
that does not spell despair?
Despair for the earth, for those
who live here,
for those who have gone.
- Lorna Crozier, "Time to Praise," 1991[1]

Faced with the task of creating a new mythology for the Canadian West, prairie writers used both the wilderness and the homesteading romance to express the "old world" values of European civilization. Their novels validated the doctrines of economic progress, androcentric development, patriarchal power, British law and Victorian Christianity, and privileged the culture of Anglo-Canadians above the spiritual and economic traditions of "foreign" immigrants and plains indigenous people. By denigrating the value of untamed Nature in favour of wheatfields, railroads and ordered settlements they elevated Western civilization above wildness and thus participated in the Europeanization of the Canadian prairies.

The myth of "progress" that evolved from these stories of Western man's foray into the wilderness influenced the relationship of settlers to their new homeland and helped

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[1]p. 46.

determine the course of prairie history. Mythology, as Richard Slotkin notes, creates a "constellation of compelling metaphors" (6) that dramatizes the worldview of a people and provides the ideological basis for their subsequent behavior. It recapitulates human experience and places this experience within the context of a people's political and spiritual values. Often expressed in the form of popular fiction, myth "draws on the content of individual and collective memory, structures it, and develops from it imperatives for belief and action" (Slotkin 7). Myth shapes a nation's sense of public mission, and thus influences the role that its people play on the global stage.

The myth of "progress" created by the Canadian wilderness romance provided an ideological blueprint for the transformation of wilderness to civilization. The dozen novels that I discuss in Part I (along with eleven short stories and the nine additional novels to which I refer) are thematically united by their common adherence to an anthropocentric worldview that sees wild Nature as a source of raw materials for human use, by their Eurocentric belief in the superiority of Western civilization to the culture of the plains indigenous people, and/or by their acceptance of patriarchal power as the necessary force behind economic development. The protagonists in R. M. Ballantyne's The Young Fur Traders and William Butler's Red Cloud glory in the beauty and freedom of the wilderness but view it, finally, as a source of the furs and gold that provide the wealth for their return to civilization. The protagonists in John Collins's Louis Riel the Rebel Chief and in Ralph Connor's Corporal Cameron and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail fight to protect the future prosperity of Western settlements from the ravages of Indian and Métis rebels. The hero in Harwood Steele's Spirit-of-Iron uses the force of an indomitable spirit and the power of the British Empire to make the West safe for European economic expansion. The protagonists in

Douglas Durkin's The Heart of Cherry McBain and The Lobstick Trail equate progress and success with the "man's work" of railroad building, agricultural settlement and mining development. The authorial point of view in Ballantyne's The Prairie Chief and Edgar Ryerson Young's Oowikapun privileges Victorian Christianity above the inferior moral and spiritual values of indigenous people; similarly, in Agnes Laut's Lords of the North and Hulbert Footner's The Fur Bringers it privileges European culture above the degraded savagery and ignorance of brutal (or foolish) Indians and half-breeds. The lesson to be learned from these novels is clear: wild Nature and wild Indians must give way before the greater power of money and civilization. Even Butler, who laments the destruction of a magnificent wilderness and the obliteration of a noble Indian culture, concedes that preservation of the natural world and the integrity of its indigenous people must not be allowed to obstruct economic progress.

This economic progress is also the primary goal of the homesteading romance. From Alexander Begg's "Dot It Down;" A story of Life in the North-West in 1871 to Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows: A Story of the Alberta Foothills in 1926, early prairie writers privileged the acquisition of material wealth above the preservation of natural ecosystems and traditional cultures. The anthropocentrism, androcentrism and Eurocentrism that underlie the aspirations of fur traders, missionaries, policemen, railway builders and mining entrepreneurs in the wilderness romance are equally evident in the homesteader's quest for prosperity. The farmer protagonists in Begg's "Dot It Down", W. H. P. Jarvis's The Letters of a Remittance Man to His Mother, Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Canadian Born and Harold Bindloss's Winston of the Prairie, By Right of Purchase, Lorimer of the Northwest, Masters of the Wheatlands and Prescott of Saskatchewan all gain wealth and domestic happiness by

the judicious exercise of prudence, strength, determination and hard work (supplemented, in many cases, by luck in the form of inheritances and successful financial speculation). These qualities enable men to master wild Nature and to win the hearts of the women they love. The Anglo-Canadian values that ensure their success are re-iterated in Ralph Connor's The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan, Flos Jewell Williams's New Furrows, E. Antony Wharton Gill's Love in Manitoba and Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart. The Slavic and Belgian protagonists of Connor's and Williams's novels win wealthy Scottish and English sweethearts by discarding their "degraded" peasant cultures for the "superior" culture of British settlers; the thrifty, hard-working Swedish and Icelandic protagonists of Gill's and Salverson's works, on the other hand, can preserve their "foreign" traditions because their values are compatible with those of the dominant Anglo-Canadian culture. Even the hero in Robert Stead's Grain, bound to the land by ties of affection, participates in the drive for progress when he succumbs to his fascination for the power of machines and ultimately leaves the farm for a mechanic's job in the city.

In contrast to these preoccupations with wealth and power are the spiritual concerns of women and men who pursue an oppositional quest for community. The female protagonists in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Arthur Stringer's Prairie trilogy and Nellie McClung's "The Black Creek Stopping-House," Sowing Seeds in Danny, The Second Chance and Purple Springs reject economic criteria as the sole measure of success and embrace an alternative set of "feminine" values that emphasize the importance of domestic harmony and nurturing relationships with humans and the land. Frederick Philip Grove, using the conventions of literary realism, portrays male protagonists on a similar quest. Niels Lindstedt in Settlers of the Marsh and John Elliot in Our Daily Bread both come to realize

that wealth and possessions cannot meet their need for spiritual connection to other people. Although Lindsted's quest ends in the reconciliation and healing of literary comedy, while Elliot's concludes with the tragic awareness of failure, both novels reflect the thematic conclusions reached by Stringer, Osteno and McClung: prairie immigrants need the restorative power of community in order to heal the divisions which alienate them from each other and from the "new" land.

What role did these early novels play in the formation of the worldview that guided the development of prairie society? How much influence did they have on the direction of Western agriculture? Although we (the descendants of an immigrant people) cannot measure their quantitative impact, we know that the written word is a powerful tool. We know that it helps to shape the values and expectations that determine the way in which people respond to their environment. Since art affects the way in which we relate to the world, as Neil Everden points out, it must share responsibility for the impact of human actions on the global ecosystem:

> . . . the source of the environmental crisis lies not without but within, not in industrial effluent but in assumptions so casually held as to be virtually invisible. Oscar Wilde once asserted that art does not imitate life, life imitates art: we come to occupy the landscape we create. If so, our scarred habitat is not only of our doing, but of our imagining. . . . (xii-xiii)

We cannot rewrite the early wilderness and homesteading romances that glorified the imposition of Western civilization on a wild land and a primitive people. We can, however, use their texts to revision prairie history and to reinterpret the story of European settlement. We can invert the moral order of their fictional worlds and imagine an alternative,

sustainable culture based on the oppositional values of bioregionalism, deep ecology and ecofeminism.

In order to avoid the unconscious sins of the past we must replace the immigrant settler's estrangement from the land with the bioregionalist's love of geographical place. The sense of alienation that many immigrants experienced contributed to the myth of hostile Nature and delayed their emotional adaptation to the ecological constraints of the prairies. Emotionally rooted in another civilization and culture, they could view with equanimity the destruction of indigenous peoples and a foreign landcape they had not yet made home. The consequences of this spiritual isolation from the land, Harold Simonson rightly observes, is social and ecological disaster:

> We vandalize, pollute, plunder and ravage what is separate from us; we revere, protect and cherish what we belong to. Separated we match our ego against the "other"--whether it be the land, the community or another human being--and in destroying the "other" we measure our triumph. (Simonson 145)

Pioneering woman and man, bound to the strange "new world" by economic necessity rather than affection, could ravage that which s/he saw as a natural resource separate from--and inferior to--humanity. Nature was the other, a commodity to be reaped rather than a life force as important as the human settlers. We need the oppositional values of bioregionalism, of emotional commitment to the forests, wooded hills and plains of the West, in order to create a sustainable culture appropriate to the geographical realities of our home place.

Since anthropocentric arrogance prevents accommodation to the demands of place, we need the ecocentric worldview of the "deep" ecologist in order to live harmoniously with

the other inhabitants of prairie ecosytems. Humanity's perception of itself as separate from and superior to the natural world poses a threat to the entire ecosphere. As long as we see ourselves as the most important part of creation, Stan Rowe notes, we "will rationalize our proclivities to use, waste and destroy whatever parts of the world our technology qualifies as 'resources.'" To protect the earth from further depredations we must recognize its intrinsic value and must put "ecosystem before organism, the whole before the part" (Home Place 40), the planet before its people.

In order to repair, finally, the damaged web of relationships that composes the prairie ecosystem, we must replace the patriarchal domination of woman and Nature with the community-building activities of ecofeminism. Patriarchy privileges economic success and mastery of Nature above the emotional bonds that sustain human beings and strengthen their affection for the natural world. It legitimates the "masculine" power that enabled the heroes of the wilderness and the homesteading romance to conquer a "virgin" country in the name of progress. We need the nurturing power of ecofeminism to mediate the conflicting demands of humans and other species, and to heal the split between Nature and civilization.

How much are Western settlers to blame for failing to consider ecological limits to industrial and agricultural development? How should we view the homesteaders who subdued wild Nature in order to harvest the riches of the fertile soil? It is easy to censure the unscrupulous entrepreneurs, crooked speculators and mercenary politicians who sacrificed ethical principles and moral decency in order to rape the land. It is easy to blame greedy farmers whose desire for wealth extended beyond a legitimate need for moderate profit. It is hard to condemn, however, the ordinary women and men who sought a new life of freedom and modest prosperity on the prairies. It is hard--and hypocritical--for those of us who are

the descendants of European immigrants to question the righteousness of our ancestors when we are conscious that they obtained for us the land that we enjoy today. As Andrew Suknaski says regarding his feeling of "vaguely divided" guilt for "what happened to the Indian," we experience guilt for taking land from aboriginal people and additional guilt because "to feel this guilt is a betrayal of what you ethnically are--the son of a homesteader and his wife who must be rightfully honoured in one's mythology" (qtd. in Scobie 12). Conscious that we are the offspring of a pioneering past and conscious, too, of our own complicity in ecological destruction, it behooves us both to honour the women and men who built prairie society and to challenge the ideology behind their concept of progress.

The story of these pioneers, ironically, is as much a tale of their victimization as of ecological exploitation. As I point out in Chapter 9, the motivating force behind Canadian immigration policies was the promise of prosperity for Eastern business interests. Rather than benefitting from agricultural development, many homesteaders endured poverty and hardship until, defeated by poor crops and low grain prices, they sold or abandoned their farms. The principle beneficiaries of agriculture have always been agricultural service industries, marketing corporations, government bureaucracies, university research institutes, farm-credit banks, politicians of every persuation and urban consumers. Their interests have consistently been safeguarded by high input costs and low commodity prices. "In the modern city-agriculture system," Stan Rowe says, "the urban majority sets the goals and the methods to achieve them for the small percentage of the population on the land" (Home Place 169). This situation has always existed in the West. Greater productivity, higher yields, newer crop varieties and bigger farm machinery have kept food prices low without benefitting prairie farmers. Urban needs for cheap food, marketable export surpluses and

sale of agricultural inputs, not the well-being of the farm economy, have determined the growth-oriented direction of Western agriculture[2]. "Who in the city," Rowe asks, "can make a buck out of small self-sufficient farms or out of small self-sufficient hamlets or out of the discovery of cultural rather than chemical methods to control weeds or out of **reduced** production so as to rebuild the soil?" (Home Place 170). Farmers are the **obvious** culprits in a food system geared for production at the expense of the long-term health of prairie ecosystems, but the dominant interests of urban politicians, consumers and business people have always been the impetus to agricultural expansion and the continuing depletion of prairie soils.

The fictional history of European settlement, generally ignoring the consequences of economic progress, is a tribute both to the homesteader and to the fur traders, missionaries, policemen, railway builders and mining entrepreneurs who conquered the wilderness. Their story, however, is only of English-speaking settlers. With few exceptions, we cannot read in the pages of the wilderness or homesteading romance the story of First Nations people or "foreign" immigrants, nor can we read the story of the vanquished buffalo or the grasslands broken by the farmer's plough. Instead, we read the story of the victors, of the women and men who changed the physical and cultural face of the prairies. These people were not villains, nor were they more selfish or more ideologically motivated than other humans. We

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[2]A recent Science Council of Canada report, Sustainable Agriculture: The Research Challenge, cites statistics that show the comparative health of Canadian farmers and the urban beneficiaries of government agricultural policies. While farm bankruptcies in the Prairies increased 1000% from 1979 to 1991 (19), average per capita expenditure on food declined. Canadians now spend a smaller proportion of their income on food than any people except Americans (16). Steadily increasing input costs (Wilson 49 and 61), however, have ensured the continued prosperity of agri-business corporations and other sectors of the farm service economy.

read their stories now not to condemn them but to question those values that continue to dominate us today. Since we are likely to continue living by unacknowledged myths though the world around us changes and demands changes, knowledge of the past becomes a necessary part of present wisdom. An ecocritical reading of the wilderness romance reveals the anthropocentric ideology of economic progress that guided European settlement and suggests the need for a new relationship between humankind and the natural world.

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Appendix: An Annotated Bibliography of Other Early Prairie Fiction

Allan, Luke. Blue Pete, Half-Breed. New York: The James A.McCann Company, 1921.

A pot-boiler Western, this novel is set in the Cypress Hills region of Saskatchewan. An improbable half-breed named Blue Pete joins forces with the Mounties to curtail rustling and murder.

Beynon, Francis Marion. Aleta Dey. 1919. London: Virago Press, 1988.

This autobiographical novel by a Manitoba journalist, pacifist and women's rights activist traces the life of its protagonist from her far-from-idyllic childhood on a prairie farm to her years as a newspaper women's editor in Winnipeg. Aleta's death from the blow of a returned solder who strikes her as she protests Canada's war effort at a public meeting is central to the novel's dominant theme--the silencing of those who oppose the dominant culture.

Bindloss, Harold. Carson of Red River. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1924.

This romance novel traces the fortunes of an English engineer/ship-builder who emmigrates to Manitoba. In disgrace at home for a crime that he did not commit, he regains honour and fortune in the brave new world of the West.

Constantin-Weyer, M. A Man Scans His Past. Trans. Slater Brown. Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1929.

A translation of Un Homme Se Penche Sur Son Passé, this novel covers the adventures of a French horse trader/northern fur buyer/prairie farmer who both laments the passing of the wilderness and exults in the economic opportunities of the new Dominion.

Eaton, Winnifred. Cattle. New York: W. J. Watt & Company, 1924.

This Western love story set on four Alberta ranches is a tale of greed and evil punished and of long-suffering virtue rewarded.

Garrioch, Rev. A. C. The Far and Furry North: A Story of Life and Love and Travel in the Days of the Hudson's Bay Company. Winnipeg: Douglas McIntyre Printing and Binding Company, 1925.

Rev. A. C. Garrioch was an Anglican missionary in the North West between 1874 and 1891. His novel is an autobiographical account of fur trade and misssionary life during that period. Like his contemporaries, Garrioch sees the missionary as an emissary of Western civilization. His indigenous people are neither villains nor noble savages, but childlike men and women eager for God's saving word.

Gill, E. A. Wharton. An Irishman's Luck: A Tale of Manitoba. Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1914.

This intensely pro-British sequel to Gill's Love in Manitoba describes the life of Irish, English and Scottish settlers in a Manitoba farming community. The romantic love story concludes with the hero's and heroine's return "home" to the Motherland.

Goodchild, George. Trooper O'Neill: A Story of the North-West Mounted Police. New York: G. Howard Watt, 1923.

An improbable, action-packed adventure story set in the North West of the late 1800s. Among other brave deeds, O'Neill helps prevent an armed Indian and half-breed uprising led by none other than the (entirely fictitious) half-brother of Louis Riel.

Hayes, Kate Simpson ["Mary Markwell"]. "'Aweena': An Indian Story of a Christmas Tryst in the Early Days." Winnipeg: John A. Hart Company, 1906.

"Aweena" (set in the 1870s or 1880s) tells the story of a old Indian who becomes an outcast after a white Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor steals his sweetheart. The narrative point of view is sympathetic to the wronged Indian.

Lewis, Sinclair. Mantrap. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926.

This little-known work by the prominent American novelist Sinclair Lewis uses the North West wilderness as a challenging playground for New York businessmen.

Parker, Gilbert. Wild Youth and Another. Toronto: Copp, Clark Co., 1919.

This volume contains two short novels set in a Western prairie town. Wild Youth is a melodramatic tale of a beautiful heroine, her villainous old husband and the handsome young cowboy who rescues her from a wretched marriage.

Stead, Robert J. C. The Bail Jumper. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914.

The protagonist of Stead's first novel is a young man who leaves the farm and becomes manager of a store in town. In this tale of honesty and integrity versus greed and selfishness, the wronged hero vindicates his honour and wins both a good job and the love of his lady.

---. The Cow Puncher. Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1918.

Dave Elden, son of an alcoholic foothills rancher, moves to the city and becomes rich from profitable, and dishonourable, land speculation. Then the bottom falls out of the land market; thoroughly chastened, he marries his childhood sweetheart and redeems himself by dying a hero's death in the Great War.

---. The Smoking Flax. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924.

This novel, companion to Stead's Grain, tells the story of the man who marries Gander's sister Minnie. Calvin Beach, university educated, leaves the city and

becomes a hired man on the Stake farm. He subsequently becomes a free-lance journalist and enjoys an arcadian life in the country.